



DONALD ELTON ELLESTAD

July 5, 1931 - November 25, 2024

Donald Elton Ellestad, called Donnie by many, died on Monday, November 25, 2024. During his last months, Don had struggled with more than his fair share of health issues. Covid isolation in the nursing home added confusion to a long list of challenges; but even then, he put a smile on his problems and moved forward. On November 20, he was taken by ambulance to Gundersen Lutheran in Lacrosse, Wisconsin. The helpful staff of caregivers believe Don had a stroke. Residual paralysis along with being 93 years old led to Don passing in his sleep at 2 am.

Born July 5, 1931, Don was the third or fourth child of Neuman and Emily Ellestad. Donald & Dorothy were "The Twins." No one knows which of the twins were born first. Growing up on a farm in Wilmington Township, Don started in country school and later attended high school in Spring Grove.

Don is survived by a son, Scott Deters of Scottsdale AZ, two sisters, Dorothy Karlsbrotten of Spring Grove and Norma Johnson of White Bear Lake and many nieces and nephews. Don and his favorite nephew, Craig Ellestad, spent hours together talking about family history as well as the history of Spring Grove. Topics Don loved.

Don was preceded in death by his wife of 42 years, Marie Schwartzhoff Ellestad, his parents and two siblings, Mervin Ellestad and Lone Quinnell.

Don's life adventure began when he enlisted in the Army during the Korean Conflict. Don missed Spring Grove while stationed in Alaska where he developed a passion as a medic. Don often said he should have taken the offer to be trained as a nurse or physician's assistant by the Army in Houston Texas. It seemed God had other plans for Don to help others.

Unfortunately, Don's basic training requirements to march in such a precise fashion caused a lifelong disability to his left knee. However, the Army instilled in him a love of country that he would display in his leadership roles in American Legion Post 0249. Don was Spring Grove American Legion Company Commander 5 times and assistant to the commander many times more. Under a leadership team that included Don, the current Legion facility was financed and built.

Returning to Spring Grove after his military time in Alaska - Don became a Manager at Control Data Corporation (CDC). Don interviewed and hired many people. He was fond of saying, "I could tell who I would hire by the way they walked across the floor prior to the interview." As a child of the Great Depression, Don admired hard work.

Shortly after CDC left Spring Grove, on September 1, 1970, Don accepted a job with the Houston County Assessor's office. In almost 29 years of working for the county Don was most proud of his time as Houston County Veteran Services officer.

Without sharing names, Don would share 'life stories' at the family dinner table. For example: the Houston County farmer who survived life as a World War 2 prisoner of war in Germany. The hardships that a poor man endured... He lived as a hermit and only came to see Don because word got out that Don took actions to help veterans who were truly suffering.

In another situation, a family friend from Wisconsin came to see Don. This veteran was a two-tour survivor of the Vietnam War. Technically he was not Don's responsibility, but Don could see clear signs of what we now call PTSD. Don helped this man and countless other Veterans in need.

While in his first year at the Courthouse, Don was befriended by Fremont Deters. At the same time, Fremont's daughter in law was separated with a divorce to follow. Fremont introduced Donnie to Marie and while they were not married for some 3 years, Don started his lifetime relationship with the nicest person he had ever met.

Don was married on the Friday of the Houston County Fair, in a small ceremony with no family present, except for Alice Brown (Marie's sister) and Tom Thorson and his wife Mary. This common start began Don's biggest life adventure. As a power couple, Don and Marie volunteered and helped others for the next 42 years. Don married very well, and they were happy together.

When Don retired from his employment with Houston County in 1999, he said, "When you work hard they give you more and more work, so I retired." It is hard to dispute that Don's responsibilities in the Houston County Courthouse are now broken into several departments, all with full-time managers.

Following his retirement, Don got a part-time job at Whispering Pines, at which he worked full time. Don found ingenious common-sense solutions which led to Whispering Pines never having to have a vacancy. There was often a waiting list to get into this section 8 complex.

In his free time, Don collected historical photos of Spring Grove. He would show these and answer questions at Syttende Mai, of which Don was a

founder. Don researched and wrote books about the history of Spring Grove, Minnesota, Dorchester and Bee Iowa. Don went so far as to visit the site of the former Dorchester Brewery with his wife.

When he retired a second time, Don still loved to be busy. He continued volunteering, started painting and traveling. That was fine with Marie. When they were not volunteering, they were scheduling flights to visit their son. Don once said, "I am seeing the US by just visiting Scott" including trips to Atlanta, Cleveland, Phoenix, San Francisco, and Times Square in Manhattan New York.

Phoenix was Don's favorite place to visit. He just loved the dry air and hot sun which eased his breathing issues. When in Phoenix, he could not soak up enough sun and heat.

Don was a medical miracle. Over a dozen years ago, during surgery on a very treatable colon cancer growth, doctors determined that Don had stage four liver cancer. Initially given 4 to 6 months to live, a specialist at Fort Snelling VA predicted Don could live a year, maybe a little more. He showed no signs of cancer and lived almost 15 years. An autopsy was requested by Gundersen hospital and this may cause a closed casket at the service. Don would have loved to be part of research to cure cancer

Don was a self-taught man who admired the common man yet was very special in his own way. Don had many favorite sayings, one of which he said just last week. "All great men are dead, and I am not feeling so good."

The family hopes you can attend the service at Immanuel Lutheran in Caledonia, MN at 11:00 on December 4. The wake will start at 10:00 with a lunch served afterwards. This will be followed by interment with military honors at Trinity Lutheran Cemetery in Spring Grove.

Previous Events

Visitation

DEC 4. 10:00 AM - 11:00 AM (CT)

Immanuel Lutheran Church
419 E Grove St
Caledonia, MN 55921

Funeral Service

DEC 4. 11:00 AM (CT)

Immanuel Lutheran Church
419 E Grove St
Caledonia, MN 55921

Tribute Wall

KM

“ 12 files added to the album *A Lifetime of Living*



Keith Myhre - December 01, 2024 at 01:18 AM

KM

I always enjoyed talking with Donnie. He shared a lot of Myhre family history with me. Both orally and printed.

Keith Myhre - December 01, 2024 at 02:15 AM

SD

What lovely photos - some of the originals will be on display at the wake on Wednesday. Thank you for posting them!

Scott Deters - December 01, 2024 at 10:23 AM

KM

You're welcome, Scott. I also put together a family tree. Don't know if you/anyone can see it or if I need to share it via email addresses. Or if you can click on [Start a Tree](#) to see it.

Keith Myhre - December 02, 2024 at 01:52 PM

SD

Keith, Don's nephew Craig (Mervins son) is very interested in this topic. He and Don would spend hours talking about it! Craig will be at the funeral and if not I will get you his contact information

Scott P Deters - December 03, 2024 at 02:21 PM

EW

“ I enjoyed all the visits Donnie and Marie made to visit his mother years ago when I worked at the NH. Since that time I've run in to Donnie at different places and we'd share a nice little visit. Such a nice man, glad I had the pleasure of knowing him.

Emily Wiste - November 29, 2024 at 06:48 PM

JF

“ Needed to correct my memory of Don. My predictive text said Dan and I apologize for that.

Jeff Fredrickson - November 27, 2024 at 06:09 PM

JF

“ Just wanted to say how sorry I was to hear of Dan's passing. He was across the street neighbor of the funeral home and I always enjoyed visiting with him when he would be taking one of his many walks down Main Street. I also looked forward to talking with him regarding veterans issues when he was the veteran service officer, I send my sincerest condolences to the family Jeff Fredrickson

Jeff Fredrickson - November 27, 2024 at 06:01 PM



“ I am saddened to hear of Don's passing. When he was the Veteran's Service Officer and I worked in Court Administration at the Houston County Courthouse, our offices were just down the hall from each other. Don always kept a jar of candy in his office (mostly for us girls down the hall). We affectionately called him "the candy man". Sometimes we would even buy candy to refill the jar for him. He was always kind to us and expected us to help ourselves to the candy jar. I will forever remember his humor, his smile and his infectious laugh. Rest in peace Don. You and Marie are together again and more than likely dancing in heaven! Joanne Schuldt

Joanne Schuldt - November 27, 2024 at 01:43 PM

SD

Thanks little Jo

Scott Deters - December 01, 2024 at 10:26 AM

FD

I don't remember exactly what year I first met Don. I'm thinking some time between the time he started working at the Court House and Feb 1972 when my dad Fremont Deters died suddenly. Don and dad became fast friends. Knowing both of them I understand completely. Later I learned that dad introduced Don to Marie his wife of 42 years. Don was proud of his dedication to helping veterans and to his Norse heritage. A humble but great man. RIP good friend. I'm glad I knew you. Joe Deters

franklin deters - December 04, 2024 at 08:03 AM

TJ

“ *The Deters Family. Joe, Carol and Jason purchased the Beautiful Heart Bouquet for the family of DONALD ELTON ELLESTAD.*



The Deters Family. Joe, Carol and Jason - November 27, 2024 at 10:54 AM

TJ

“ *The Deters Family. Joe, Carol and Jason planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of DONALD ELTON ELLESTAD.*

The Deters Family. Joe, Carol and Jason - November 27, 2024 at 10:54 AM