

Paul Jessen Remembered

03.21.2012

Jessen was Tireless in Civic Service

Published Wednesday February 15, 2012 Provided with permission from the Omaha World Herald.

By Christopher Burbach
WORLD-HERALD STAFF WRITER

Paul C. Jessen, a prominent attorney known in Omaha civic and business circles for his professionalism, humble leadership, volunteer spirit, hunting stories and "Christmas crafts," died of cancer on February 14, 2012 at age 59.

With his passing, Omaha lost a community backer in the prime of his civic life.

"This is a big loss for Omaha," said Terry Kroeger, a friend of Jessen's and publisher of The Omaha World-Herald, on whose board Jessen had served from 2003 through 2011.

Jessen, co-founder and chairman of the Koley Jessen law firm, was a highly regarded attorney, especially in his primary areas of expertise, estate planning and business succession.

"Paul cared deeply about his family, the entire Koley Jessen team, his clients and friends and his community," said Michael M. Hupp, Koley Jessen's president. "Koley Jessen has lost a tremendous leader and role model. The Omaha community has lost an extraordinary business and charitable adviser, leader and philanthropist. And many of us here have lost a mentor and very dear friend."

Among his community activities, Jessen was a longtime supporter of the College World Series, most recently as vice president and secretary of College World Series of Omaha Inc.'s volunteer board.

He helped guide the nonprofit organization and the series through the turbulent waters of moving to a new stadium and extending Omaha's contract with the NCAA to host the CWS for 25 more years, said Jack Diesing Jr., CWS Inc. president.

Paul Jessen Remembered

Jessen and his wife, Mary, who had horses themselves, were longtime supporters of the River City Roundup, especially the 4-H stock show, mentoring a 4-H member each year. Jessen became the event's chairman in 2011, and it set records in participation and attendance. In December, Jessen helped negotiate with the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association to keep the rodeo in Omaha and televised for at least three years.

Jessen had been a member since 2002 of a Knights of Ak-Sar-Ben Foundation membership board, His Majesty's Council, but he was more flannel shirt than silk stockings.

Jessen's friends and colleagues knew better than to schedule anything on fall Saturday mornings. That was time for hunting.

In the fall of 2010, Jessen managed to shoot a bighorn sheep on a hunt in Wyoming, one of the last items on his hunting wish list. Jessen broke a bone in his leg on the way down the mountain â€” but hiked to camp with the sheep on his back, and drove to Omaha by himself before going to the doctor days later.

"He described that to us like it was fun," Hupp said.

In October 2011, three months after serious cancer surgery, Jessen shot a trophy antelope along the Platte River in Wyoming.

Diesing called Jessen indefatigable, "a real cowboy," and a man of honesty and integrity "who made you feel like a million bucks and could keep you on track. . Paul could write the book on how to get the best out of life, both personally and professionally."

Jessen was born Aug. 8, 1952, in St. Paul, Neb., to Lothard and Marion Jessen of Dannebrog, Neb. He lived in Dannebrog his first two years before the family moved to Sioux City, and then in the mid-1950s to Omaha.

They lived in the Rockbrook neighborhood. Jessen graduated from Westside High School in 1970 and with high distinction from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in 1974. After becoming a certified public accountant, he graduated summa cum laude in 1977 from Creighton University School of Law.

He married Mary Regan over Christmas break in his first year of law school. He became a proud father nine months later, when the couple's daughter, Kjirsten Jessen Finnegan, was born. Mary Regan Jessen was pregnant with their son, Chad, when Paul was admitted to the Nebraska Bar in 1977. Mary and both of the couple's children survive him. So does a brother, Peter C. Jessen.

It was Mary and Paul Jessen's dream as empty nesters to live in the country and ride horses, she said. They made that happen in 2003.

Paul Jessen Remembered

"We just loved being outside in nature," Mary Jessen said.

For their country home, Paul Jessen, whose hobbies included woodworking, crafted a fireplace mantel and bar top from logs. They also had a giant black check mark painted on the wall â a symbol of one of Jessen's favorite things to do.

"He always had projects, and he carried a spiral notebook with a list of things to do," Mary Jessen said. "He loved to make check marks in the notebook. He liked to see how many check marks he could make in a day."

At bedtime, he liked to observe, "You CAN do it all in one day!"

"His thing was to say, 'Never waste a minute.' In his 59 years, you could say he lived 120," Mary Jessen said.

"Christmas crafts" were on his to-do lists for the past decade or more. He burned sayings into chunks of wood he had picked up on hunting trips. Each year, he gave about 70 as Christmas gifts, such items as candleholders that read "Lighten up."

In 1988, Paul Jessen started what's now known as Koley Jessen with six other attorneys.

At first, he wanted to have a solo practice "where he would write estate plans, take his dog to the office with him, and wear a flannel shirt and jeans to work," said Hupp, a co-founder.

But Jessen decided clients would need more services than a solo practitioner could provide. He and the others put together a practice that grew into a full-service law firm that employs 101 people, including 50 attorneys.

Hupp said Jessen strove to build a law firm culture "of being honest and forthright with each other, try to do the right thing, treat everybody fairly, with empathy and compassion."

Added Diesing, "If Paul Jessen said it, take it to the bank."

Diesing said Jessen maintained his positive attitude even after doctors discovered in early January that his cancer had returned, spread and would be terminal.

"I never once heard him say, 'Why me?'" Diesing said.