

HONORABLE GILBERT BOVARD

The Honorable Gilbert Bovard passed away on November 23, 2020, due to complications of the COVID virus. Gil practiced law in Mason City for 31 years. In 1983 he was appointed to the Iowa District Court, serving on the bench for 22 years, until his mandatory retirement in 2005.

Judge Bovard was born in Pasadena, California, in 1927. He was raised by his maternal aunt and uncle in Mason City, Iowa. He was an Eagle Scout. Judge Bovard graduated from Mason City High School in 1945, served at the Great Lakes Naval Station, and attended the University of Minnesota and Pomona College in California. He played football for the Pomona Sagehens. He attended law school at the University of Iowa and graduated in 1951. He married Eugenia Ulvestad and returned to Mason City to practice law. They were parents to four children, Ralph, Sally, Doug, and Scott. Gil would sign his letters to his children by “Hang by yer thumbs,” which was his euphemism for “Love, Dad.” In 1971 Gil began writing a two- or three-page letter called “The Blatt,” which was sent to family to let them know what he and his wife were doing, what was happening at the lake, his political views, and other wild stuff. He continued this weekly newsletter for nearly 40 years. His children described him as one-in-a-million and a renaissance man.

Gil was a Methodist lay minister, a member and president of the Lions Club, Masonic Temple, and president of the Mason City School Board for 12 years. In 2003 he received the 1945 Distinguished Alumni Award for his community service. There was no adventure that he was not willing to explore. He played flute in the Mason City Meredith Willson Band. He made elaborate stained glass windows. He enjoyed photography, and he had his own darkroom in his

home. He engaged in calligraphy. He piloted small aircrafts until his 60s. He was an accomplished sailor and served as a race judge and commodore of the Clear Lake Yacht Club. He was a long-time editor of "From the Crow's Nest," the Clear Lake Yacht Club newsletter, where he nicknamed himself "The Old Crow." He earned a black belt in judo at age 40. He played rugby on the River City State Championship Team with men half his age, and he competed until he was age 55. He refereed rugby until he was 60. He often compared his role as a judge with being a rugby referee. He explained, "You have to know the rules. You have to know human frailties. Some people will try to get away with whatever they can. You have to know to look over your shoulder once in a while so you don't just see what they want you to see."

After rugby, Judge Bovard picked up ice hockey as a goalie in the men's over 30 league and played until age 78. He windsurfed and also rode in a single-shell scull in Clear Lake most mornings from 5:30 to 6:30 until nearly age 80. At age 72 he swam in the 1999 US Master's Swimming National Championships. He teamed with his three sons to place ninth in the 200 meter medley relay in the under 60 age division. He was a top five finisher in several events at the Canadian National Swim Meet in Toronto in 2003. He skied the 50 kilometer Birkebeiner Cross Country Ski Race twice. He was a maestro on the cribbage board. He loved to recite the "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll and Kipling's "The Ballad of East and West."

Judge Bovard enjoyed every minute of his judicial service. He spoke eloquently and chose his words carefully. His writing was plainspoken and colorful. He once stated, "In all my years on the bench, I came across very few criminals—but a lot of good people who made stupid mistakes."

His colleagues, his community, and his friends and family mourn the passing of Judge Gilbert Bovard but continue to marvel at his life well lived.