

Art Armbrust – Plumbing and Heating Contractor, Community Volunteer, Author, Cancer Researcher

Arthur A. Armbrust, father of seven and friend to hundreds, died on Thursday, June 25, 2009 after decades of service to the many communities to which he was connected. A funeral Mass celebrating his life will be held on Monday, June 29th at noon at St. Michael's Church in Wheaton, where he was baptized 81 years ago.

Born in Wheaton in 1927, he attended St. Michael's grammar school, Wheaton High School, Morningside College in Sioux City, Iowa and Arizona State University in Tempe. After marrying Vada Doyle of Glen Ellyn in 1951, he began working with his father Clarence in the Wheaton-based plumbing business the elder Armbrust started in 1918. Despite living a life of significant accomplishment, the roles he cherished most were as father, friend, fan and philanthropist.

His life was full of accomplishment, centered on giving to others. Some of his many civic contributions were publicly recognized. In March of 1971 the Wheaton Park District Board of Commissioners passed a resolution that said, in part, "When the life and times of Arthur Armbrust are recorded surely the past six years of service to the Wheaton Park District will be listed as one of his most rewarding contributions." One of the awards he most appreciated was becoming Rotary International's first "Mr. Four-Way Test" award recipient in 1973 for service to the school and business community. He thought Rotary's four-way test was the credo to a life lived well, demanding one to ask of one's actions and activities:

- Is it the truth?
- Is it fair to all concerned?
- Will it build goodwill and better friendships?
- Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

He served on the Wheaton Public Library Board from 1974 – 1977. The St. Michael's school sports program gave him an award for his selfless dedication from 1956 – 1984, during which he helped organize and establish the DuPage Parochial League. In 1988 St. Francis High School saluted him for "22 years of caring services to the SFHS Community." And his outreach and involvement extended beyond Wheaton. Recognizing his 33 years of contributing to the development of Cedar City, Utah, the mayor and city council of this growing community in southwest Utah feted him with Art Armbrust Day on September 4, 2003, granting him a key to the city in gratitude for his "generous gift of land which made possible the construction of the Ashcroft Observatory at Southern Utah University and the Cross Hollow Equestrian Center."

Family was central to his life, and from that central root system sprouted many branches, including friends, sports and philanthropy. His wife and he are the parents of seven children and 30 grandchildren. Quite remarkably in this mobile society, all seven children and their families live in the Chicagoland area, with five of the families living within a mile of the home he built on West Elm Street in Wheaton in 1956. At his death, his immediate family numbers 48. He was looking forward to the birth of his first great grandchild in the fall and the addition of a new grandson-in-law next June. With more than

eighteen brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, he has more than 100 nieces and nephews and knew each one by name.

He cultivated friends wherever he went -- from his neighborhood, church and school communities, business and civic activities, and with golf groups at St. Andrews and St. Charles Country Club. He had the unique gift of making everyone he met feel that they mattered. Despite living such a full life, he made time for everyone. Among his greatest gifts was his ability to listen and to give advice by asking questions, forever reserving judgment of others.

As a fan, he had no peer. His family estimates that over the last 21 years, he attended more than 1,400 games, plays, recitals or performances that his grandchildren participated in, many in sports programs he helped organize and develop. Just five days before his death, he went to a Little League All-Star game to see his nine-year-old grandson play.

His acts of philanthropy were frequent and invariably informal. In 1959 his seven-year old nephew died of leukemia. Mr. Armbrust turned his feeling of abject loss and helplessness into constructive, life-giving energy, and began a 49-year quest to study the causes of cancer and seek its cure. He read hundreds of books and thousands of scientific articles. He attended professional conferences for cancer researchers. And he translated that knowledge into hundreds and hundreds of pages of papers, letters, and treatises, summarizing what he learned and espousing some theories. In 1973, in a letter to the editor published in the Chicago Tribune he wrote, "As long as science is a human activity carried on by individual men and by groups of men it must remain open to inquisition...It is the duty of newspapers and politicians alike to inquire, investigate, and thoroughly study cancer research. The director of the National Institutes of Health has claimed 'magnificent strides' where in truth the last 26 years we have been highly stagnant." Despite occasional frustration that his voice as a layman was not being heard, he never gave up the quest.

In 1967, during a time of widespread social unrest, he and his good friend Doug Loerzel edited and self-published a book, "Do You Believe in Miracles," consisting of 35 stories he solicited through an ad he placed in Reader's Digest. At the time he was the father of five (with two still on the way) and running a demanding family business. But he took the time to put the book together and explained why in his Preface. "It is my hope that the result [from reading this book] will be a greater freedom from fear, renewed confidence in the Supreme Power, increased compassion for our fellow man – regardless of the color of his skin or his creed – and greater courage to go forth and meet each problem with confidence day by day."

As noted, he donated land to Southern Utah University in order to build an observatory. On the day the observatory was dedicated, he placed a plaque in the base of the structure in memory of two of his nephews who died at an early age that read, "Let us look to the heavens for our hope." The plaque serves as a lasting memorial to his nephews and a poignant reminder and inspiration to the hundreds of astronomy students who have used the observatory to keep a proper perspective on their world.

He helped start numerous businesses with sound advice, sensible encouragement, and financial backing. And, more often than not, no legal agreement bound the recipient to a payment plan. He

generously gave money to employees, former employees, friends, family members and even strangers. And he never invested the energy to keep track of who owed him what.

Next to the ever-present support of his family, he was a relentless supporter of the underprivileged and underappreciated, reaching out to the disabled and those discriminated against. As an upperclassman at Morningside College in the late '40's, he organized the back-to-school dance to welcome George Allen as the school's new head football coach. When he learned that the dance hall he had rented would not allow the African Americans from the football team and school to attend, Mr. Armbrust changed venues and found a hall that was open to all.

He died at the age of 81 in the family room of his home in the company of his wife Vada and his seven children. Art Armbrust, lifelong resident of Wheaton, adopted son of Cedar City, Utah, a man for all seasons and people.