



Howard D. Rich

December 27, 1931 - June 6, 2021

Howard D. Rich, 89 of Bluffton, passed away on Sunday morning, June 6, 2021, at Lutheran Hospital in Fort Wayne.

Born Dec. 27, 1931 in Adams County, Indiana to Edward and Lillie (Beer) Rich, he was part of the first class to graduate from Adams Central High School in 1950. He married Beverly J. Lobsiger in June 1955 at the Monroe United Methodist Church.

He served in the United States Army in the Military Police, and then graduated from Indiana College of Mortuary Science in Indianapolis.

Howard came to Bluffton in 1956 to work for Bill Thoma in his funeral business and became a partner within five years, forming the Thoma/Rich Funeral Home. He was encouraged by his new employer to join the Bluffton Rotary Club, which he would serve in several offices including president and remain active for 55 years, rarely missing a meeting. He once credited the club's motto, "Service Above Self," for leading him into community service.

The first effort was a joint project with his wife. During their first year as members of the Downtown Merchants Association, the couple responded immediately when it was announced that due to lack of funds, the city would not be putting up Christmas decorations. The couple volunteered to coordinate the project, donating their time and materials.

He was soon asked to serve on the Community Chest board, the forerunner of the United Way and was the fund drive chair. Howard served on the boards of the Wells County Public Library and the Chamber of Commerce including

terms as president of each. He co-chaired (with Beverly) the local bicentennial celebration in 1976 and he was a key leader in the revitalization efforts triggered by the loss of the Corning Glass plant in the late-1980s. This resulted in the creation of the Rivergreenway, the downtown landscaping and the Kehoe Riverfront Park.

When the chamber of commerce and the Creative Arts Council were both in need of new office and program space in 2001, Howard conceived the idea of the Arts, Commerce and Visitors Centre on the banks of the Wabash and led the effort to raise more than \$2 million to make the vision a reality in 2004. He retired from the funeral home in 2001, but remained active in a number of community and Rotary projects, including a total refurbishing of Rotary Park along the Rivergreenway. This resulted in the new pavilion being named in his honor.

Howard Rich was named the Volunteer of the Year in 2014, he received the Wells County Community Service Award in 1977 and the Outstanding Citizen of the Year from the chamber in 1991. Howard and Bev were presented with the Art Leadership Award from the Arts Alliance of Indiana in 2002, and were the Grand Marshals for the Bluffton Street Fair opening parade in 2007. Howard was a longtime member of the First United Methodist Church in Bluffton, where he faithfully served on many committees.

In addition to his wife, he is survived by two sons, D. Douglas Rich of Centennial, Colorado and Tom (Laurie) Rich of Pittsboro, Indiana. He was preceded in death by his parents and siblings: Dorothy Rich, Eileen Borne, Doyle Rich, Harold Rich, and Clisty Fruchte.

Funeral Services will take place at 10:30 a.m. Friday, June 11, 2021, at the First United Methodist Church with Pastor Sherrie Drake and Rev. Larry Ray officiating. Burial will follow at Elm Grove Cemetery in Bluffton with military honors by the United States Army Honor Guard and the American Legion Post 111 Honor Guard.

Calling hours will take place from 4 to 8 p.m. on Thursday, June 10, at the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton.

Memorials may be made to the First United Methodist Church or Wells Community Boys and Girls Club.

Funeral arrangements have been entrusted to the care of the Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home in Bluffton. Friends can send online condolences to the Rich family at www.thomarich.com.

Cemetery Details

Elm Grove Cemetery

3500 East State Road 124
Bluffton, IN

Previous Events

Visitation

JUN 10. 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home
308 West Washington Street
Bluffton, IN 46714
<http://www.thomarich.com>

Funeral Service

JUN 11. 10:30 AM (ET)

Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home
308 West Washington Street
Bluffton, IN 46714
(260) 824-3850
info@thomarich.com

Tribute Wall



“ *Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Howard D. Rich*



Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home - June 10, 2021 at 03:30 PM



“ *Howard D. Rich*

September 08, 2022 at 08:26 PM



“ *Valerie Leo lit a candle in memory of Howard D. Rich*



Valerie Leo - August 07, 2021 at 01:02 AM

BG

“ We are so sorry to learn of Howard's passing. I don't think Howard ever forgot a face and he always knew you and had something to talk about with you. I served on some of the same boards that Howard did but not at the same time, except for the Boys and Girls Club and he was a joy to serve with. He would always ask about my family and when Marion was working on the Bluffton Bridge, he would stop and chat with him. He had provided services for many of our family members and was always so kind and wanted to make sure he could do anything for us. If you knew Howard, you had a friend! Blessings to the family-Howard was a jewel.
BJ & Marion Gray



BJ Gray - June 12, 2021 at 03:53 PM

OS

“ We are sending our deepest sympathies and prayers to the Howard Rich family.. I have know Howard for almost all of my life and he has taken very good care of so many members of my family on both sides and for that Howard we say thank you, it meant so very much.. It was a shock to hear of Howard's passing. it's sad to say but very true wells county has lost another great man, he sure will be greatly missed. God be with the Howard Rich family in the time of there loss, help them find peace and comfort. RIP Howard.. 🙏🙏🙏🙏 Otis and Donna Smith



Otis ad Donna Smith - June 11, 2021 at 12:51 AM

VJ

“ Valerie Wilson Jackson lit a candle in memory of Howard D. Rich



Valerie Wilson Jackson - June 10, 2021 at 05:03 PM

BF

“ Bret L. Fair lit a candle in memory of Howard D. Rich



Bret L. Fair - June 10, 2021 at 02:21 PM



“ 51 files added to the album Life Tributes



Thoma/Rich, Lemler Funeral Home - June 10, 2021 at 08:58 AM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 09, 2021 at 05:13 PM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 09, 2021 at 04:29 PM



“ Emerald Garden Basket was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 09, 2021 at 03:45 PM



“ Tom & Laurie - We are sorry and deeply saddened by your family's tremendous loss. Please know each of you is being held close in thought and prayer during this painfully difficult time. Sending our heartfelt condolences and many hugs for all. 🥺💔🙏🕊️🙏💔🥺



Jay Ard & Debra Jo Endres-Ard - June 09, 2021 at 10:55 AM



“ Sweet Remembrance Spray was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 09, 2021 at 09:10 AM



“ A long time ago my mother and I had the privilege of having Howard and Bev and their two "little" boys as next-door neighbors on East Washington Street for several years. Wonderful neighbors, wonderful friends, wonderful memories! The family certainly has my prayers and sympathy! Howard contributed so much to the community throughout his life and he will be greatly missed by many. -- Janet (Morris) Herring

Janet (Morris) Herring - June 09, 2021 at 08:38 AM



“ Bev and family, so sorry for the loss of the love of your life, you were two very special people, may God be with you through this difficult time. Sending my love. Gerry Claghorn

Gerry Claghorn - June 08, 2021 at 08:46 PM



“ Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 08, 2021 at 06:34 PM

BM

“ *Dear Bev and Family*

I need to take a moment to express my sympathy to you and your sons on the loss of Howard. It doesn't see possible that it was 51 years ago last January Howard and Bill brought us from California to Bluffton, IN to work for the Thoma Rich Funeral Home. You were living above the funeral home at that time. I have a great respect for Howard and and convinced he was part of God's plan for us to realize our dreams of owning our own funeral home. I know Howard loved the Lord, his family and the community. His actions proved that to anyone who knew him. He was also responsible for helping us find our home on Johnson Ave across from Heyerlys and helped Linda find a job nursing at Wells Community through Diane Surface. Over the years we became very close friends with Diane and Chuck. May God's peace sustain you through these difficult times. You were truly blessed to have over 60 great years together. i know what you are going through. I never thought I would bury Linda, but its been 4 years this July.

In Christian Love
Bruce Myers



Bruce R Myers - June 08, 2021 at 04:07 PM

CP

“ *Beverly and Family, so very sorry to hear of the loss of Howard. Our thoughts and prayers are with all of you.*

Clif & Tammy Holloway & Roger Pollock - June 08, 2021 at 03:18 PM

BC

“ Dear Beverly, Doug, and Tom so very Sorry for your loss of a Great Husband, and Dad Howard! We are totally shocked on what happened to Howard! U Lost a very Wonderful and Kind Man! 🙏 We have known Howard for many many years now stemming back to when I worked at Masterson’s Clothing Store over 35 years ago! I remember him coming into there and seeing my old Boss Adrian Sprunger and selling him some clothes! Heaven has gained another Angel into Gods Kingdom! Howard always had a sweet Spirit about him ever time I seen and talked to him! May God grant you all the Peace, Comfort and Grace at this Sad time in your lives! God Bless the Rich family! Love, Barry and JoEllen! ❤️



Barry Crosbie - June 08, 2021 at 12:51 PM



“ Sweet Tenderness was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 08, 2021 at 12:18 PM



“ Sentiments of Serenity Spray was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 08, 2021 at 11:05 AM

CH

“ Dan and I were very saddened to hear of Howard's passing. He was always so very kind and caring. I first met him through my dad, Reverend Huntman, and the many funerals they worked on together. Whenever we would see Howard out and about town, he would ask about my parents and Dan's parents. He was a go getter and driving force in the well being of Bluffton and Wells County. He will truly be missed. God bless your family as you grieve the loss of your very special "Howard".



Christine and Dan Hunt

Christine and Dan Hunt - June 08, 2021 at 09:12 AM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Howard D. Rich.



June 08, 2021 at 08:57 AM

HW

“ The United Methodist Memorial Home (DBA Heritage Pointe of Warren) sends it sincere condolences to Howard's family. He served on our Board of Trustees many years ago and his leadership as a Board member was invaluable. Our thoughts and prayers are with Bev and the family at this time.

Heritage Pointe of Warren - June 08, 2021 at 08:22 AM

RJ

“ Howard told me once that his dad told him to always leave the wood pile higher than he found it.

I think that describes Howard's life. He was a winner.

Rem Johnston

Rem Johnston - June 08, 2021 at 12:46 AM

MM

“ *Condolences to the family.
Howard and Bill treat our family well. Prayers for strength and comfort at this time. RIP SIR*

Mick Musser - June 07, 2021 at 11:35 PM

RD

“ *Howard and Bev provided me the ability to advance my career in funeral service while working at Thoma/Rich by instilling the importance of providing quality service. Howard mentored me in many ways with an emphasis of giving back to your community. He truly lived 'Service Above Self' and for that he has my greatest respect. Rest in peace Howard.*

In grateful memory. Randy & Eleanor Danielson

Randy Danielson - June 07, 2021 at 10:02 PM

NL

“ *Our condolences to Bev and family. Howard was a true Bluffton institution. Always a quick wit and a smile for everyone he met.
Larry and Nancy Leitz*

Nancy Leitz - June 07, 2021 at 09:42 PM

WB

“ A couple of years ago I was standing in line at the Lift meal at the First UMC. This guy came in and went through the line shaking everyone's hand and saying that he was glad we voted for him. Of course I had no idea who he was since I was visiting Bluffton for the first time so I asked this guy by me who that was. He said, "Oh that was Howard Rich he likes to joke around."

Warren Byerly and Jo Ann Record

Warren Byerly - June 07, 2021 at 06:33 PM

NM

“ Condolences to the family of Howard. I didn't know him well but he was always so kind when we were going through grieving times. And I don't believe that I ever saw him without a smile.

Nolan and Suzanne Markley - June 07, 2021 at 03:29 PM

PV

“ I am so very sad to hear of Howard's passing. I just had a really nice visit with him in early May when we were in town. I always enjoyed our conversations. He was such a sweet guy who loved his community & wanted to see it grow & be better. He was a true supporter of many of the improvements & a tremendous friend to the Bluffton Parks Dept & the Kehoe Concerts. He will be missed!

Pam Vanderkolk - June 07, 2021 at 10:51 AM

SD

*We remember Howard's kindness at the funeral home. He loved his community and his family. He was a godly man.
Don and Sue Dian*

sue Dian - June 07, 2021 at 03:14 PM

KW

“ Our family is at a loss, Howard and my mom (Christine Egly Melick) were childhood friends. Every time my would see Howard she would light up. The two would laugh and reminisce. Mom called this morning in tears, Howard was never going to leave us. He will be greatly missed.

Our thoughts & prayers go out to his family.

Loving Memory, Family of Christine Melick

Kristy Walker - June 07, 2021 at 10:15 AM

GK

I was sorry to read of Howard's death. Howard and I first met when he and Bob Haggard started working at the funeral home on west Market Street, now the Historical Society building. I lived at 507 W. Washington St. and our back yard was real close to the funeral home. Howard, Bob and I used to play badminton in the yard at the funeral home. I was just a kid at that time but both Howard and Bob were really good to me. We had an old garage behind our house but no car, so one day Howard came over to talk with my mother about renting our garage. He had just purchased a new car and didn't have garage space at the funeral home. My mother said "of course" so for a period of time Howard kept his car in our garage.

In 2001 my wife and I purchased the Washington Street Inn B&B and moved back to Bluffton. I then had the opportunity to get re-acquainted with Howard. He hadn't changed a bit! He was always a joy to talk with, always had a smile on his face, and always had the best interests of the community in mind. He will definitely be missed by many. I send my condolences.

Gene Kyle - June 07, 2021 at 08:41 PM

JD

“ Howard was a wonderful man and an asset to our community, he will be greatly missed.

Jerry&Cindy Dillon - June 06, 2021 at 11:48 PM

DG

“ I met Howard when I joined the Bluffton Police Dept in 1972. He was always friendly and had a smile. I used to do repairs on his mowers when I had the shop. Several times in the last few years I would run into him at the Y. He still always had the smile and took time to talk to you. The Rich family will be in our prayers. Dan and Darlene Gerdom



dan Gerdom - June 06, 2021 at 11:07 PM

DN

“ Dwight & Nancy lit a candle in memory of Howard D. Rich



Dwight & Nancy - June 06, 2021 at 09:02 PM