Obituary

Benson, August Gerald – Officer, Educator, Investor

Professor Emeritus, College of Education and Office of International Studies and Programs, and Lt. Col, USAF (Ret.) August “Jerry” Benson was born in Detroit, Michigan in 1917 of immigrant parents, August John Benson of Sweden and May Kennedy Fitzgerald of Ireland. Jerry, mentally alert to the very end, left us on Wednesday, November 23, 2011.

The family moved to Centerline, MI at an early age and he lived there until entering the military in 1942. During a twenty-year career in the Air Force, he rose from Private to Lt. Col. and served in England, France, Germany, North Africa, Hawaii, and various bases in the U.S. in the Personnel or Human Resources field. In October, 2011, the Honor Flight Network flew Jerry and one hundred other WWII veterans to Washington, D.C.; to visit the WWII Memorial, and to receive acknowledgement for their service and sacrifice.

Jerry earned a BBA from the University of Michigan where he met and married Mary Eloise Spitznogle of Logansport, Indiana in 1949. Later he earned an MA in Guidance and Counseling and a Ph.D. in Administration of Higher Education at Michigan State University. He joined MSU in 1964 as Advisor to Foreign Students and Scholars, in the Office of International Studies and Programs. He retired in 1983 as Professor and Advisor Emeritus.

During his tenure, Jerry was involved in professional activities at state, regional, national and international levels. He served as President of the NAFSA: Association of International Educators in 1974–1975, the year Vietnam fell. He led teams of U.S. educators to Japan, Taiwan, and the Middle East as guests of national Departments of Education. He also served as chairman of a number of committees and workshops devoted to promoting international educational exchange and published a variety of papers and articles in his professional field.

He maintained a long-term interest in the business world and upon retirement began full-time investing. In addition to pursuing individual investing, Jerry organized two major investment clubs that included other retired professionals. He was enthusiastic, energetic and creative in his work in the Air Force and the University; with his primary focus on the Personnel and Human Resources field.
He was commended by the Air Corps for his timely management of a special project involving the U.S. airlines during the immediate post-war period.

Jerry supported a variety of charities including the American Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services, The American Heart and Alzheimer’s Associations and the Parkinson’s and Arthritis Foundations. He actively supported St. Thomas Aquinas Church in East Lansing, Michigan. He had a strong and active interest in college sports and was involved with The Ralph Young Fund, Rebounders’ Club and the Downtown Coaches Club of MSU.

Jerry is warmly remembered by family, friends and colleagues as an individual whose zest for life was matched only by his unwavering belief in accentuating the positive in all that life offered. He learned to dance early in life and enjoyed it for exercise and entertainment. His life reflected a deep and quiet wisdom expressed not only in word, but through action.

He is preceded in death by his wife, Mary; and two sisters, Mary J. Van Hulle of Wayne, MI and Margaret S. Roberts of Webberville, MI. He is survived by his three daughters: Kathleen Benson Chaney (Victor) of Fort Wayne, IN; Susan Marie Sierawski (Edward) of Naperville; and Debra Benson Mazzella (Joseph) of Naperville, IL. Also surviving are three grandchildren: Anne Marie, Stephen August and John Joseph Sierawski of Naperville, IL.

Donations may be made to the charity/organization of your choice listed above or to Honor Flight, Inc., Attention Diane Gresse, 300 E. Auburn Avenue, Springfield, OH 45505, or visit: www.honorflight.org.