

Remembering W. J. Wenger



Mr. William J. Wenger, president of National Mutual Benefit from 1973 to 1987, passed away on August 31, 2007, at the age of 89. His wife, Helen, preceded him in death in November 2004.

Wenger spent almost his entire working life with National Mutual Benefit. He was hired as a field supervisor with NMB in 1952, and was appointed director of agencies in 1954. He was elected and served as vice president of the Society for ten years, prior to being named its sixth president in 1973.

Due to his background in sales and strong belief in fraternalism, new initiatives were implemented at National Mutual Benefit during his leadership. Emphasis was given to the concept of marketing insurance and fraternalism together—as interrelated benefits.

An agency system was established, using full-time career sales representatives. Representatives were trained to develop client relationships with members to help them achieve financial security through the organization's updated, competitive life insurance programs. During his term as president, insurance in force increased by \$334.5 million, and assets increased by \$34.7 million.

A Fraternal Department, adding additional support for National Mutual Benefit's local fraternal lodges (branches) was created. A fraternal director was hired and programs were set in place to carry out NMB's mission of *people helping people in time of need*. Annual training seminars were held to teach leadership and branch operation skills to the volunteer branch officers.

Keeping up to date with data processing equipment, a new computer system was installed that allowed for a more efficient money management process. Rather than having local branch secretaries collect premium payments as had been done in the past, payments were mailed directly to the Home Office.

When Mr. Wenger retired as president, he was named chairman of the board, an advisory position he held until the early 1990s.

A Wisconsin native, he graduated from Madison East High School and attended the University of Wisconsin before entering military service. He was a veteran of World War II, serving 31 months in the infantry as master sergeant and 23 months in the U.S. Air Force with

the rank of First Lieutenant.

Mr. Wenger made his home in Middleton, right outside of Madison, where he and his wife, Helen, raised their family. They were married for 65 years and made service to others a part of their everyday life. He served as a scoutmaster for the Boy Scouts for many years and as secretary of his church council. Knowing his commitment to carry out anything he was asked to do, the church pastor asked him to be chairman of its Centennial Committee.

Wenger was also active in the Madison Chapter of Junior Achievement and the Multiple Sclerosis Society. He was treasurer, vice president, and president of the Yahara Lakes Association, and president of the board of directors of the Madison Opportunity Center, which offers job training for individuals with disabilities.

A strong supporter of the fraternal benefit system, Wenger was elected president of the Wisconsin Fraternal Congress in 1958. He was a key player on the WFC committee that procured state and national stature to Stony Hill School, having the historic birthplace of Flag Day placed on both the Wisconsin and National Register of Historic Places.

He served the association of fraternal benefit societies, the National Fraternal Congress of America, successively as director, vice president, and as its president from 1976-1977. He was the first representative of National Mutual Benefit to do so.

Even after retirement, Mr. Wenger did not stop being an active fraternalist. He continued to volunteer as a member of NMB Branch 400 and became a trustee on the branch board.

Mr. Wenger was a leader and volunteer by example and served the membership of National Mutual Benefit with dignity, integrity, and decisiveness. ♦



Wenger raises the U. S. flag and U. S. Bicentennial flag on the roof of the home office building in downtown Madison, Wisconsin. The Bicentennial Commission awarded NMB the Bicentennial flag for its involvement in the restoration of Stony Hill School, the birthplace of Flag Day, in 1976.



NMB representatives attend a 1960 Home Office School of Advanced Underwriting under the direction of W. J. Wenger (back left).



In the early 1970s, W. J. Wenger, representing National Mutual Benefit, and fellow representatives of Wisconsin Fraternal Congress member societies witness Wisconsin Governor Patrick Lucey signing the Fraternal Week Proclamation.



A 1986 meeting of the National Mutual Benefit Board of Directors is led by President Wenger.



U.S. President Ronald Reagan greets NMB President William Wenger during a 1984 White House briefing on the role of fraternal benefit societies in solving social and economic challenges.



Joining other NMB volunteers, Mr. Wenger (black NMB hat), his wife, Helen, and son, Bob (both in front of Habitat sign), help build a Habitat for Humanity home in Madison in 1992.