

News

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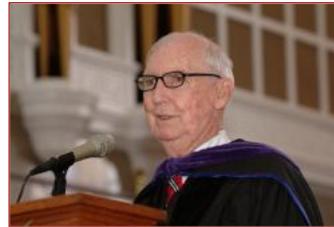
Memorial service a warm tribute to Richard E. Roberts '50

The memorial service for former Union Trustee Richard E. Roberts '50 embodied the way he lived his life: with kindness and humor.

Family, friends, colleagues, Trustees, faculty, alumni and students who gathered to honor Roberts' life overflowed the balconies of Memorial Chapel as they reminisced above the somber opening strains of Pachelbel.

The stage was adorned in garnet and white floral sprays, and Roberts' folded, military flag as a World War II Air Force vet was displayed prominently on a brass stand beside the podium. The hymns and scripture readings played out as meticulously as Roberts led his life, for he had given memorial service instructions to Union President Stephen C. Ainlay just months before he became ill.

One by one, reflections encapsulated the man who served as husband, father, grandfather, friend, concerned citizen, accomplished lawyer, senior partner of Higgins, Roberts, Beyerl & Coan P.C., and loyal son of Union College — a man who strove to help and touch every life he encountered.



Richard E. Roberts '50 (1926-2006) [Enlarge](#)

"What a loss, what a gift," said Ainlay of the passing of his friend and their short time together. "He was an inspiration to us all and was dedicated to his family, his community and his country."

Ainlay expressed comfort in the thought that "length is not a measure of depth" and noted that their friendship held depth.

Roberts served as a member of the College's Board of Trustees from 1978 through 1993. He also served as president of the Alumni Council, class agent, a leader of the College's Annual Business Campaign, and a member of a presidential search committee. A former basketball and lacrosse player at Union, he was an avid fan who cheered his alma mater at many games and was a strong supporter of Friends of Union Athletics. He was inducted this fall in the College's Athletic Hall of Fame.

Classmate and lifelong friend Charles Abba '50 recalled Roberts' good sense of humor, including a love of the *Three Stooges* and monkey antics; pride in his British immigrant heritage; and his one departure from his ethnicity, his love for Italian food.

Michael R. Suprunowicz, president of Higgins, Roberts, spoke of his "friend, teacher and the benevolent partner who considered it an honor to serve his clients, and never differentiated whether they were widowed, prominent or indigent." The firm was founded in 1837. Suprunowicz drew appreciative laughter from the audience when he noted that his devoted colleague probably worked there the entire 170-year span.

"He was a pit bull of a lawyer," Suprunowicz said. "If he latched onto you, you couldn't shake him off. He was a master of working a room and loved being a lawyer. I believe he represents three to four Apostles now..."

Roberts felt his job wasn't completed unless a client left happier than when he or she came in. Roberts retired in 1976, but still came to the office daily and believed hard work and commitment were the path to achievement.

"His legacy to us," continued Suprunowicz, "is understanding where his tireless energy comes from. When you give to others, and give of yourself, the well never runs dry."

The Rev. Victoria J. Brooks-McDonald, Union's interfaith chaplain, echoed those thoughts in her choice of scripture from Thessalonians II. "Give thanks because it is right," she read. "Dick operated from a deep sense of gratitude, and he gave of himself from that gratitude."

The service closed with President Ainlay reading tributes from Roberts' three children, Allison, Bradley '82 and Christopher. Their words evoked fond memories of their father, and they promised to look after their mother, Barbara. They also vowed that Roberts' grandchildren would come to know him through watching the video "Hats Off to Dick Roberts." Roberts' son, Jeffrey, predeceased him.

"Education was how he rose from modest beginnings," Ainlay read from Bradley's memorial, "and my father's only goal in life was for us to go to college and make something of ourselves. If we can strive to be one-tenth the person he was, then we'd have done something with our lives."

Following the service, mourners filed out of Memorial Chapel to the sounds of *Auld Lang Syne*, shaking hands with one another and recalling happier days from Roberts' alma mater. Outside, a lone bagpipe played a selection of tunes that would surely have made Roberts smile. A reception followed in Old Chapel.

Memorial contributions may be made to Friends of Union Athletics, c/o College Relations, 807 Union Street, Schenectady, N.Y. 12308.

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