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Grant Dicke 1955 ~ 2008

Kept business ahead of curve

Highway safety focus of family firm

By Joan Giangrassse Kates

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Dicke Tool Co. adapted well during its first century of business, switching from manufacturing tools to highway safety products as interstate highways began crisscrossing America.

Yet despite its success, Grant Dicke saw potential for more when he became the fourth generation head of the Downers Grove-based company, in the early 1990s.

"He took new approaches to marketing and expanded our line of distributors all over the country," said Paul Wander, regional sales manager for the company.

Responding to demand to protect highway workers, the lifelong Downers Grove resident focused on creating a product line that included everything from reflective signs to top-of-the-line safety clothing.

"Things really took off when Grant began taking a long, hard look at what it would take to keep workers safe," Wander said.

Mr. Dicke, 52, president of Dicke Tool Co. and a longtime volunteer firefighter in Downers Grove, died Tuesday, Sept. 30, in Good Samaritan Hospital, Downers Grove, after collapsing at home, apparently from a massive stroke.

Founded in 1886 on Lake Street in Chicago, Dicke Tool moved to Warren Avenue in Downers Grove in the early 1900s. Several years later the company needed to rebuild after a fire destroyed its original building. That event led to the Dicke family's long-held interest in fire safety.

In 1976, Mr. Dicke followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, becoming a member of the Downers Grove Volunteer Fire Department.

He attained the rank of lieutenant, before the department disbanded in 1993. In the ensuing years, he continued to support the full-time Fire Department, friends said.

"Grant used to accompany his father to the firehouse all the time as a boy," said Bob Lang, also a former Downers Grove volunteer firefighter. "He got an education just by hanging out."

A 1973 graduate of Downers Grove North High School, Mr. Dicke studied dentistry for a while at the University of Illinois in Chicago, before joining the family business. He became company president in the early 1990s.

"He was very analytical in his approach to things and demanding in a quiet way," said Wander. "He led in an understated way."

Mr. Dicke married his wife, Vera, in 2000. "He was at a really wonderful point in his life," Lang said.

In addition to his wife, survivors include a son, Thomas; a daughter, Grace; and a sister, Mary Maly.

Services will be held at 10 a.m. Saturday in St. Andrews Episcopal Church, 1125 Franklin St., Downers Grove.

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