Richard Riddell, attorney, known for strong ethics

By Catherine Tarpley
Seattle Times staff reporter

For half a century, attorney Richard Henry "Dick" Riddell was a force to be reckoned with in the courtroom.

He took tough cases and persuaded skeptical judges to see things his way. As president of the Washington State Bar Association in the 1970s, he censured and sometimes even revoked the licenses of lawyers whose ethics didn’t meet the bar’s standards. In judicial circles, his opinion was often taken as gospel.

Mr. Riddell also played tennis as hard as he argued cases, though his friends admit that his opponents often had less to fear on the tennis court than they did in the court of law.

Mr. Riddell, a founding partner of the law firm Riddell Williams, died May 29 in Las Vegas after complications from a stroke. He was 83.

Mr. Riddell was "very outgoing, optimistic and generous," said attorney Steve DeForest of Riddell Williams. He belonged to numerous organizations, including the Rainier Club, the College Club, the Seattle Tennis Club and the Broadmoor Golf Club.

After earning his law degree from Harvard University in 1941, Mr. Riddell returned to Seattle and started working at his father’s law office. It was the younger Riddell who transformed the practice into the large firm it is today.

Mr. Riddell was "well-known for taking difficult, complex cases," said David Hoff, an attorney at Riddell Williams.

In the late 1960s, Mr. Riddell represented South King County residents who wanted compensation from the Port of Seattle for the loss in value to their homes caused by jet noise at Seattle-Tacoma International Airport. Riddell won. The ruling, which the state Supreme Court upheld, was important because it established that a government action that results in restrictions on the use of private property may constitute a "taking" of that property even if the landowners aren't forced out.

In 1963, Mr. Riddell became president of the King County Bar Association. In 1976 he became president of the Washington State Bar Association. During the 1970s, while he served on the state bar’s Board of Governors, Mr. Riddell helped write some tough new ethics rules for lawyers.

Mr. Riddell was appointed chairman of the Seattle Transit Commission in 1971. He served on the board of directors for King Broadcasting from 1947 to 1992.

Mr. Riddell was born in Seattle on Nov. 29, 1916. After graduating from Queen Anne High School at age 15, he worked for two years as an office boy at the W.R. Grace Steamship Co.

He graduated from Stanford University in 1938.

Mr. Riddell is survived by his wife, Delores; daughters Dorothy Alleyne, Wendy Riddell, Katie Reeves and Caren Gloyd; sons Mark Riddell, Bill Gloyd, Steve Gloyd, Robert Gloyd and Tom Gloyd; and 13 grandchildren.

Following his wishes, Mr. Riddell’s family will not hold a funeral or memorial service for him.

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