Willard Wright, 81, Dies; Legacy Of Service To Others

By Carole Beers
Seattle Times Staff Reporter

So well did Willard Jurey Wright guide community groups and legal clients through taxes, estates and financial planning that the law firm he co-founded in Seattle offers an annual award in his name.

"He insisted by his demeanor on standards of civility that are tremendous models," said Bradley Diggs, managing partner of Davis Wright Tremaine. "Our firm has a Willard Wright Award to the lawyer who best exemplifies Bill Wright's spirit as a lawyer active in the community."

And so well did Mr. Wright cultivate friends and family that people from as far away as Spain are expected for his funeral at 4 p.m. Tuesday at Epiphany Church, 38th Avenue and East Denny Way, Seattle.

Mr. Wright died Wednesday (Nov. 26) of cancer. He was 81.

"His theme was service to others," said daughter Susan Wright Reed of Santa Rosa, Calif. "He was involved in their lives, inside their problems, and not afraid of that...He had a large family, but made everyone else feel like family, too."

Born to Seattle lawyer Raymond White and Elizabeth McPherson Wright, he was proud of his Scottish ancestry, played Scottish golf courses and displayed the McPherson tartans on everything from towels to ties.

He graduated from Lakeside School in 1932, Princeton University in 1936 (bachelor of arts in political science) and the University of Washington Law School in 1939. In World War II, he studied the Japanese language and served in naval intelligence in China.

Mr. Wright was deeply involved in civic groups and his family. He was a longtime trustee of Lakeside School, a supporter of Seattle Art Museum and an organizer of family gatherings - particularly at his beach home near Bremerton. He also visited his nephews, niece and grandchildren at college.

"He made people feel good and tried to raise us that way, too," said Reed. "He gave us an allowance for showing consideration to others, as well as for chores. I would get 57 cents for kindness. But you couldn't brag about your kindness, or you wouldn't get your money."

Mr. Wright made his children keep account books, Reed said. "He still had his account book from seventh grade...But he also taught us how to cheat on those, because he told us his father didn't notice when he put down under expenses, 'One bucket of air.'"

His affiliations include service as a trustee of Princeton, president of the Seattle-King County Bar Association, president of the Seattle Estate-Planning Council, trustee of The Seattle Times board of directors and president of Seattle Urban League.

He also was a delegate to the 1952 Republican National Convention.

Other survivors include his wife of 27 years, Katharyn Wright of Seattle; children Alice Hyde of Wilmington, Del., Rosemary Steven of Seattle, Raymond Wright of San Diego, Anne Little of Seattle, Gwenedlyn Brinkley of Seattle, and Kathy Gildea of Jackson Hole, Wyo.; sister, Elizabeth Massie of Moraga, Calif.; and 13 grandchildren. His first wife, Alice Wright, died in 1969.

Carole Beers' phone message number is 206-464-2391. Her e-mail address is: cbee-new@seattimes.com

Copyright (c) 1997 Seattle Times Company, All Rights Reserved.