



Alton N. Solem

July 20, 2011

Alton "Tony" Solem Sr., 82, of Traverse City, passed away on Wednesday, July 20, 2011, at Grand Traverse Pavilions, with his wife and son by his side. Tony was a successful businessman with an adventurous entrepreneurial spirit. He was born on Aug. 16, 1928, in Suttons Bay and graduated from Suttons Bay High School, where he was senior class president and captain of the basketball team. He studied agriculture and was enrolled in the ROTC program at Michigan State University. He enlisted in the U.S. Air Force, completed his basic training at Lackland AFB in San Antonio, Texas, and then was promoted to staff sergeant. He married T. Lee (Lott) Solem, and his military career took them to Hamilton AFB in California, where he became a control tower operator. He served two tours in the Korean War, with grateful pilots often coming to the tower to thank him for his skill in landing them safely. Following an honorable discharge, Tony returned to civilian life working as a flight specialist for the FAA at the airport in Monroe, La. Missing their family, Tony and Lee returned to Traverse City, where Tony started his own company (Imperial Gypsum, Inc.) in 1958. Both he and Lee also opened a full service paint and dry wall retail store (The Paint Spot), and in 1970 they added the Sun Dry Wall Company. Tony helped establish the Builders Exchange of Northwest Michigan, an organization that promotes the building trades in the region. Through election of the Exchange Board, he served as their Executive Manager from 1977 to 2001. He loved working for the Exchange and coordinating member events and managing the office. While maintaining his

business in Traverse City, Tony purchased a commercial building company in Phoenix, Ariz., in 1984. He successfully grew the business (Imperial West, Inc.) to become one of the dominant subcontractors in the area. In 1989 he sold the business to employees who today continue Tony's business acumen in the Phoenix area. In 2001, Tony retired after 43 years in business. Tony was not only a leader in the business community, he also loved his community and cared a great deal about children's education. He ran for the Traverse City School Board in 1971 and was elected for two four-year terms. Using his leadership and business experience, he provided valuable advice and service by spearheading new vocational education programs and expanding vocational training facilities for students who chose not to attend college. Tony loved his family, his work, golf, fishing, sailing, travel and good country music. He is survived by his wife, T. Lee; son, Alton "Bud" Solem Jr.; two daughters, Linda Solem, of Grand Ledge, and Lexie Solem, of Las Vegas, Nev.; brother, Robert Solem, and sister-in-law, Lois Solem, of Suttons Bay and Florida; brother-in-law, Raymond Lott and sister-in-law, Lenore Lott, of Austin, Texas; as well as five grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; and numerous nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, Oscar and Sigrid Solem; and sisters, Doris Laird and Shirley Codere. At his request, Tony was cremated. A private family memorial was held in his honor. Arrangements were entrusted to Kalkaska Funeral Home and Cremation Services.