



## Ward J. Merchant

August 4, 1929 - October 11, 2018

Ward J. Merchant was a home town boy, born on August 4, 1929 in Elkhart, Indiana to Max E. and Nora D. (Johnson) Merchant. On October 11, 2018, he died peacefully at his home in Bloomington IN with his wife of 66 years, Mary, at his side.

Until moving to the Meadowood community in Bloomington in 2016, Ward lived his entire life in Elkhart. He was baptized and confirmed at Augustana Lutheran Church, where he remained a lifelong member. He graduated from Elkhart High School as president of his senior class. In the summer of 1946, at only 16 years of age, Ward and three friends embarked on his first "experience of a lifetime", working on a cattle boat for Heifer International to transport horses to Poland for post-war relief. With an eye for business even at a young age, he stowed away several cartons of cigarettes to divide and sell during the voyage and upon arrival. He used the profit to purchase gifts for his parents.

Ward graduated in 1951 from Indiana University with a degree in Business. He was a member of Delta Tau Delta fraternity where he was voted "Outstanding Senior". He was chapter representative in Falcons as a junior, and Sphinx as a senior. Ward earned his "I" as the senior baseball manager. Ward was elected as one of two directors of his senior class. He maintained

his dedication to his alma mater throughout his life becoming a generous supporter. To this day he is a season ticket holder to IU basketball. In 2000, Ward received from the Indiana University I Men's Association a certificate of recognition for 50 years of devotion and loyalty to IU Athletics as an "I" man. He and Mary are members of the President's Circle of IU.

At IU Ward took Advanced Reserve Officer Training Corps and graduated as 2nd Lieutenant in the United States Air Force. He went on active duty in July of 1951 during the Korean War. He was assigned to Headquarters Air Material Command at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio.

Ward married Mary Catherine Bard, who he met while at IU, in December 1951.

In February 1952, Ward was ordered to the 437th Troop Carrier Wing, Brady Field, Fukuoka, Japan. Mary joined him shortly thereafter, and they lived in a Japanese house off-base until returning to the U.S. where he was discharged as a 1st Lieutenant.

Ward returned to Elkhart in August 1953 and began working in the insurance department of St. Joseph Valley Bank where he had an illustrious career. He became manager of the department in 1966, and in 1970 was named president of Midwest Commerce Insurance, which under his leadership became one of the largest independent insurance agencies in Indiana. In 1988 Ward was appointed Executive Vice President of Midwest Commerce Banking Co. Ward developed expertise in commercial insurance and was a nationally recognized insurance professional. He shared his expertise by speaking and consulting at numerous sales gatherings of the InsurorsGroup, and at the American Bankers Association in Washington, D.C. He was a founding member of the Midwest Group, a senior management group of large insurance agencies. Ward was a director of the Independent Insurance

Agents of Indiana, Inc. and national chairman of Commercial Union Insurance Companies' Producer Advisory Council. He retired from Midwest Commerce in 1992.

Ward was a dedicated, lifelong civic leader in Elkhart. He served as a member and chairman of the Child Health Society and as a member and chairman of the Elkhart Area Career Center Vocational Advisory Council. He was a charter member of the Community Advisory Board of WVPE-FM Public Radio, and treasurer of Elkhart Community School Building Corp. which built Elkhart Memorial High School. A jazz enthusiast, Ward was actively involved in the creation of the Elkhart Jazz Festival and served as its financial chairman in 1992. Ward was an avid golfer and member of Elcona Country Club for 57 years.

Upon retirement Ward pursued his interest in seeing the world. He and Mary traveled worldwide, having visited all 50 states, over forty countries, and all seven continents.

Ward was a loving, devoted and generous husband, father and grandfather. He was our rock and his memory will be cherished by his wife Mary, sister Shirley (Dennis Cone), children David (Lois Foehringer) of St. Louis Park, MN, Steve (Cynthia Osmundsen) of Stillwater, MN, Christina Merchant Weber of Dallas, and Mike (Anne Birge) of Neshanic Station, NJ, his grandchildren Hannah (Trey Waters) of Chicago, Max of Ypsilanti MI, Emma of San Francisco, Ward and Molly of Dallas, Coleman, Sarah, and Katy of Neshanic Station, NJ, and Dylan and Maya of Stillwater, MN. He was preceded in death by his parents, Nora and Max, and his brother Jim and sister-in-law Helen.

Memorial service to be held at Meadowood in Bloomington on Sunday, October 28, 2018 at 5:00 p.m. In Elkhart, family and friends will be received

from 2:00 to 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 30, at Our Place on Main, 126 South Main Street.

Memorials may be made to the Indiana University Foundation.

You are invited to share a memory or leave an online condolence to the family at [www.allencares.com](http://www.allencares.com).

# Tribute Wall

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“ *I managed the AETNA Insurance company in Indiana, and have fond memories of working with Ward. Clyde Hall*

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**Clyde Hall** - September 15, 2022 at 09:46 PM



“ *Mary and Family -- I grew up next door to the Merchant family on McDonald Street. I remember them well. Enjoyed reading Ward's obituary. I did not know or had forgotten a lot of the things he did. His was a life well-lived. My sincerest sympathies, Kay (Robison) Tekker (Loudon, Tennessee)*

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**Kay Tekker** - October 22, 2018 at 01:41 PM