



Richard "Dick" Lee Willetts

December 5, 1926 - June 11, 2022

Richard "Dick" Lee Willetts, age 95, of Albia, IA, passed away on Saturday, June 11, 2022, at Centerville Specialty Care in Centerville, IA.

Dick was born on December 5, 1926, in Albia to James Elbert and Eura Hazel (Campbell) Willetts. He grew up attending school in Albia and graduated from the Albia High School. While still in high school, Dick passed his initial flying exam. He entered the Army Air Corps at the age of 18 and spent a year in occupation Germany as a crew chief on a P-51 Mustang.

Upon returning to the United States, Dick followed in his father's footsteps working for the U.S. Postal Railway Mail Service and ended up in Chicago where he finally took his first flying lesson. On August 14, 1949, he was united in marriage to Martha Jane Keeton in Albia and then returned home to Albia where he worked 37 ½ years with the postal rail service. Dick and Martha Jane shared 47 years of marriage prior to her passing on October 4, 1996.

Dick enjoyed being outdoors and could often be seen riding his bicycle. He and Martha Jane enjoyed traveling together and wintered in Florida. He loved to visit with others and often did so over morning coffee at Hardees. Flying was Dick's true passion. In 1960, he bought the first of four airplanes, a Piper Cub. He would later buy a Globe Swift built in 1946, a Christian Eagle bi-plane and a Cessna. He gained numerous pilot's licenses and flew commercially as

a charter pilot. Dick also started an aerobatics business, doing hillbilly clown acts at air shows. At the age of 93, he was awarded the prestigious Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award for over 50 years of exemplary aviation by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA).

Dick is survived by 2 nephews, James A. (Marsha "Marti") Willetts of Centerville, IA and David R. Willetts of Richfield, MN; 1 niece, Jennette A. (Phillip) Robinson of Prior Lake, MN; 3 great nieces, Kristine J. Eyheralde of Centerville, IA, Beth A. Robinson of Minneapolis, MN, and Sarah L. (Timothy) Johnson of St. Paul, MN; 1 great nephew, Michael J. (Katja) Willetts of Urbandale, IA; and 7 great-great nieces, Katja (Jake) Suther of Waukee, IA, Kethryn A. Eyheralde of Ramsey, MN, Emily A. Eyheralde, Samantha M. Sanders, and Madelyn M Sanders all of Centerville, IA, and Rowyn A. and Junia L. Johnson of St. Paul, MN. Dick is also survived by his aviation family and good friends.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Martha Jane; a son in infancy, Richard Bryan Willetts;

his parents, James and Eura Willetts; 2 brothers, Kenneth Elbert Willetts and Billie Eugene Willetts; and a sister-in-law, Margaret J. Willetts.

Visitation will be held from 2:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 6, 2022, at the Tharp Funeral Home in Albia with Dick's family present from 5:00 p.m.-8:00 p.m. to greet family and friends.

Graveside services will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, July 7, 2022, at Oak View Cemetery in Albia with Tom Williamson officiating and military honors provided by the American Legion of Albia, Melrose and Lovilia.

Memorials have been established to the Shriner's Hospitals for Children and St. Jude's Children's Hospitals in memory of Dick and Martha Jane's infant

son, Richard Bryan Willetts.

Cemetery Details

Oak View Cemetery

Albia, IA 52531

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL 6. 2:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Tharp Funeral Home
116 Benton Ave.
Albia, IA 52531
(641) 932-3129
<https://www.tharpfh.com/>

Graveside Service

JUL 7. 10:30 AM (CT)

Oak View Cemetery
602 2nd Ave.
Albia, IA 52531

Tribute Wall



“ *Rich was a friend of the family, having grown up with my dad Thomas West.*

I was lucky enough to catch a ride in the Swift and what a thrill when we did a roll, while we were flying from one airport to another. I had a lot of hours of airtime accumulated as a kid, and Dad would fly us to fly-ins, and we always went to air shows where ever Rich performed.

Lulla Belle - November 17, 2023 at 10:08 AM



“ *Richard "Dick" Lee Willetts*

January 30, 2023 at 05:06 AM



“ *Richard "Dick" Lee Willetts*

January 30, 2023 at 02:53 AM



“ *Sure sorry to hear this.He was my idol back when I was learning to fly up in Albia.Spent alot of time around him and flying with him.He's the one that taught me to fly a taildragger..Never a dull moment when Dick was around.One of the very best "seat of the pants flyers ever was" in my opinion.We used to tease him about not being able to fly straight and level.He said that was boring.Even got to be involved in his drunk act one time.Sure will be missed.*

Laurel Varner - June 14, 2022 at 03:12 PM

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Dick was a fun guy with a passion for airplanes and flying. Always super helpful - I'd flown back to Albia and tied down my plane. Thunderstorms came up in the evening and we headed for the airport to find Dick and Matt Watson pushing my plane into the hangar. Just typical of those guys, doing what's needed.

Charles Spaur - June 26, 2022 at 12:03 PM