

May 12, 2010

The Life of LeRoy E. Wiitala

- LeRoy E. Wiitala, 92, of Frederick, S.D, died December 7, 2009 in Venice, Florida.
- A memorial service will be held at the First Methodist Church, Frederick, S.D. on Saturday, May 15, 2010 beginning at 2:00 p.m. After the service, inurnment will be at the Savo Cemetery followed by a reception at the Frederick Community Center.
- LeRoy was the first child born August 18, 1917, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, to Arthur and Lempi (Hovila) Wiitala. The family later moved to the family farm in Savo Township near Frederick. He graduated from Frederick High School in 1934. After several unsuccessful harvests and losing a newly built barn to fire, the Wiitala family moved to Oakland, California, in 1937 to seek employment. LeRoy developed a career with Montgomery Ward, eventually becoming the chief purchaser of farm merchandise and annually designing the farm segment of Wards West Coast catalogue. At the invitation from his grandfather to farm the original homestead, he jumped at the chance to fulfill a dream of returning to farming. Or in his words, to mind the soil and not mine it. His love of the land and farm animals led him to encourage the Savo Lutheran Church to establish an annual Harvest Festival to celebrate the harvest and promote the importance of soil stewardship.
- For years, LeRoy served on the boards of Frederick's local co-ops. He served as chairman of the oil station and grain elevator for many years until retiring from farming. He also served as South Dakota Farmers Union Vice-President and on several state and county planning commissions. In addition, he participated in plays and served as an emcee for the annual Finnish Mid-Summer Festival at Savo Hall.
- In 1988, LeRoy married Melva Glarum and moved from the farm to share her residence in Frederick. In retirement, he enjoyed reading, gardening, golfing, wintering in the South and Mexico, following the Minnesota Vikings, and spending time with family and friends.
- LeRoy was preceded in death by his parents, son Brent and brothers Orville and Warren (Bill). Survivors include his wife Melva (Glarum); sons Stephen (Sheryl) of Omaha, NE, Gregg (Laura) of Amman, Jordan, and Marc of Portland, OR; grandchildren Kristine of Boston, MA and Douglas of British Columbia, Canada; brother Bob (Phyllis), sisters Shirley and Lola (Pennie) of California and sister-in-law Emi of Portland, OR. He is also survived by stepdaughters Patsy (Ed) of Albuquerque, NM, Susan (Doug) of Grand Forks, and Betty (Jeff) of Wellington, FL; step grandchildren Jason (Anne) of Minneapolis, MN and Trisha (Jake) of Denver, CO; goddaughter Peggy Worthy of Frederick; and his former wife Genevieve Baker of Aberdeen, SD.