



God, Family, and Dogs

Donald A. Gutknecht

Don was born and raised in the Milwaukee area as a member of Jordan Lutheran Church in West Allis. He developed his hard work ethic early on, delivering newspapers, cutting grass, and unloading trucks at the tender age of ten. A solid work ethic he would carry on his entire life.

It was in those early years when Don also began his lifelong love of dogs. His first dog, Butch, played with all the children in the neighborhood, no surprise a well-behaved pet. When Don was 15 years old he used his father's name to gain membership into the Milwaukee Dog Training Club. The club had an age restriction, but quickly made an exemption for Don nothing he had a clear and unique connection with canines.

Young Don was a boy of many talents and after taking formal lessons became an accomplished accordion player. He and several high school buddies formed a band called “The Stardusters” and could be seen performing at weddings. Don graduated from Juneau High School in 1950, and landed a job at Allis Chalmers. He enlisted in the army in 1952. He had an ambitious goal of making it into the K-9 Corps, a very select division within the service. Thanks to his impressive experience with dogs and key letters of recommendation, he made the cut and was a proud soldier in the 39th Infantry Scout Dog Platoon. Don was stationed and received training at Camp Carson in El Paso County, Colorado. He was shipped over seas and served his country in both Japan and Korea during the Korean Conflict.

Safely back home after his tour of service, Don once again found employment with Allis Chalmers. It was there where he met a certain special co-worker named Diana Korn. While she tried playing hard-to-get for a while, Don’s charm won her over. They later were happily married at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church in West Allis on June 1, 1957. The happy newlyweds filled their leisure time dancing the nights away and belonged to three formal dance clubs. Kids and a kennel would soon compete with the dance floor for their time.

Don took a new job with Reichel-Korfmann Co., Inc. (RK Rubber) as their office manager, handling some sales responsibilities. All this time Don still had a dream in the back of his head to work with dogs. He later accomplished that goal when he and Diana founded Animal Motel in 1960. Don balanced both business commitments while raising their growing family. First to be born was Dawn, followed closely behind by Dale, Dell, and Daryl “Fuzz”. If that wasn’t enough, Don continued to be a training instructor at the Milwaukee Dog Club. He was a very busy and dedicated man.

In 1967 Don and two partners purchased Reichel-Korfmann Co., Inc. and put the business on a successful path. He held key roles and was the company's president from 1985 until 2017. The Gutknechts own and operate RK Rubber to this day as a third generation continues in the work ethic traditions Don exemplified.

It was during the same time the Gutknecht family grew Animal Motel into one of the area's most respected training and boarding facilities. They moved locations from the original Lover's Lane site and built a new facility in Butler, WI, where the business continues to this day.

Don deeply loved His Lord and was a Christian example to his family, friends, and associates. The Gutknechts were members of several area churches with Covenant Lutheran being their "home church" for the last 40 years. He was an active member giving his time and talent on various boards, committees, and a short stint as a Sunday school teacher. He was an involved parent and trustee while all the children attended Northwest Lutheran Grade School.

God, family, and dogs (in that order) were Don's greatest loves. He felt very blessed to have and enjoy his grandchildren and great grandchildren- considering his parents had both passed early in life before experiencing that joy. Don's lifelong prayer was for his family to know and live in The Lord; to receive the grace of the sacraments and once again be united in the afterlife.

To that, Don, save us a seat at "The Bone" in heaven.

Proud Accomplishments

Founding Member- ABKA American Boarding Kennel Association

Member-IPATA International Pet and Travel Association

Board Member-Butler Chamber of Commerce

American Legion #23/Alonzo Cudworth Post

Admired Dog Trainer (he was to lead a class the day he passed)

