

William Ray "Bill" Willis

June 16, 1924 - October 21, 2014

GRANITE, OK

WILLIAM RAY "BILL" WILLIS, longtime resident of Granite, Oklahoma, passed away early Tuesday morning, Oct. 21, 2014, at Plantation Village, Afton, Oklahoma. Bill was born



in Granite, Oklahoma on June 16, 1924 to James Raymond and Ima (McBride) Willis. Bill spent his early years in Granite, Oklahoma where roaming the Granite mountains was a favorite pastime. The Willis family moved to Mangum, Oklahoma where Bill was stricken with osteomyelitis in his early teens, his left leg was amputated to save his life. A proud graduate of Mangum High School Class of 1943, Bill served as class President. During the summer months

he worked at his Dad's engineering firm that was located in Tulsa, OK, drafting blueprints for the war effort. Attending Oklahoma A&M, in Stillwater, Oklahoma from 1943-1946 Bill pursued a degree in architecture, served as President of the Sophomore class and was a founding member of the Lonesome Polecat Archery Club. He met a beautiful young lady on campus named Ellen King. On Feb. 23, 1946, Bill and Ellen along with two other couples eloped and were married in Winfield, Kansas. Bill and Ellen followed an entrepreneurial spirit by opening Willis Manufacturing where they sold and produced monuments, venetian blinds, aluminum awnings and fencing. Four children were born to this union: Billie Karen, Linda Kay, James Lance "Spogle" and Brenda Gay. While living in Stillwater, Bill served as the President of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, served as Chairman of the Civil Defense promoting bomb shelters, a member and officer of the Stillwater Elks Club, and was active in other organizations. The Willis' moved to Granite, OK in 1964 where Bill and Ellen joined the family business, Willis-Pellow Brothers Monument Works. In 1983, Bill, Ellen and their children purchased the family memorial business from J.R. Willis becoming Willis Granite Products. Active in the Granite and Mangum communities Bill joined the Granite United Methodist Church, Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Oklahoma State Alumni, Old Greer County Museum Board, Mangum Elks and last but not least he was a proud Mangum Alumni. Bill was instrumental in bringing tourism to Southwest Oklahoma being one of the founding members of the Southwest Oklahoma Recreation and Tourism Association later becoming Great Plains Country. Bill was an accomplished designer and engineer of granite memorials that can be seen across the United States. Some of his work can be seen in Africa, France, Russia and also at the Smithsonian in Washington, DC. Projects included; the Giants of the Great Plains which culminated in the 1979 dedication of the 30 foot by 30 foot mosaic of Will Rogers located in Granite, Oklahoma, design and construction of the Old Greer County Pioneer Hall of Fame in Mangum, OK, Oklahoma Heritage Plaza in Oklahoma City, OK, granite portraits in the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, Stillwater, Oklahoma, as well as granite historicals and Veterans memorials across Oklahoma and Texas. He achieved his lifetime Certified Memorialist designation at the age of 80 years old. He was a proud member of Mid-America Monument Builders, Monument Builders of North America and was an Associate Member of the American Institute of Commemorative Art. In 2007, his firm Willis Granite Products received The Governors Bill Sneed Award for supporting the arts in Oklahoma. On Nov. 30, 2010 Gov. Brad Henry recognized Bill's 15 years of service to the Oklahoma Mining and Safety Board. The Governor noted that this was the longest consecutive term served on the commission. Preceded in death by his parents, his wife Ellen, son Spogle, and brother Fred Willis. He is survived by three daughters: Billie Karen Harrison of Oklahoma City, Linda Kay Morris and husband Mike of Granite, Brenda Gay Hickerson and husband John of Granite; four grandchildren: April and husband Jody Van Ausdall, Maria and husband Tony Scarborough, Jason Harrison and Mandy Ranney; great-grandchildren: Meagan Bilyeu, Tommy Brown, Ashley Belvins, Alex Scarborough, Tristan Ranney, Amelia Ranney, Rhiannon Bennett; great-great grandchildren: Morgan Pilkinton, Chloe Bilyeu, Parker Blevins, Levy Blevins and Emma Joe Waite; two sisters: Laquita Baker of Alpine, TX, Lois and husband Frank Hess of Las Vegas, NV, along with a host of cousins, nieces, nephews and many friends. Funeral services for Bill Willis will be at 10 a.m., Friday, October 24, 2014, at the Granite United Methodist Church with Rev. Rusty Williams officiating. Interment will follow at the Granite City Cemetery under the direction of Greer Funeral Home of Granite. Bill's body will lie in state at the Granite United Methodist Church where the family will greet friends on Thursday evening from 6 until 7 p.m. Online tributes may be made to the family at www.GreerFuneral.com. The family has asked in lieu of flowers that memorials be made, in Bill's name, to the Mangum Education Foundation, the Granite Education Enrichment Foundation, the Granite United Methodist Church or to the Thlewarle Indian Baptist Church in Dustin, Oklahoma.