

# 'He was a delight'

## Former publisher dies at 79

By Dave Verga  
staff writer

He was the type of man who still sent Christmas cards to former employees every year, 15 years after he retired; the type of man who, along with his wife, befriended a woman whose husband was missing in action during World War II.

He was Paul Neal Averill, former publisher of the Birmingham and Southfield Eccentric newspapers and longtime activist in community affairs, from social issues to health to the arts.

Averill, who was 79, died of pneumonia Thursday in West Palm Beach, Fla., after suffering from cancer. A memorial service was held Sunday in Florida, where he had lived since he retired from the newspaper business in 1971.



Paul Averill  
'tremendous vitality'

A local memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. Friday at Christ Church Cranbrook in Bloomfield Hills.

Mr. Averill, former president of the Averill Press, was associated with the Eccentric newspapers for 45 years; he served as publisher from 1951 until his retirement.

A CLOSE friend and business associate, Harris O. Machus of the Machus Restaurants and Bakeries, called Paul Averill "a vital part in building Birmingham into the fine community that it is today."

His lengthy list of volunteer and community services included terms as first president of the Family Service of Oakland County and vice president of the Family Service of America. After retiring and moving to Florida, Mr. Averill served as president of the Family Service Association of Palm Beach. Family Service is a counseling organization.

He was president of the Michigan Welfare League, and charter director of the United Foundation of Detroit. He was one of the founders and twice president of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, then called the Bloomfield Art Association.

HE ALSO served on the boards of directors of the United Community Services of Metropolitan Detroit, Michigan United Fund, Michigan State Association of Community Mental Health Boards, Friends of Modern Art.

In 1960, Mr. Averill received the "Volunteer of the Year" award from the Oakland County Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

Professionally, he was honored in 1985 by the Suburban Newspaper of America with its Lesher Award for outstanding service and contributions to the industry.

Averill was recognized for his efforts to implement professional business practices at the community newspaper level and to enhance the standing of community newspapers within the local business community.

Mr. Averill was born in Cleveland in 1908. His older brother, George Rodgers Averill, took control of the Eccentric newspaper in 1920. Paul joined the newspaper in 1926 as advertising manager after graduating from the University of Michigan.

BY 1929, they helped build the newspaper to the point where it carried the largest volume of advertising of any of the nation's 16,000 weekly newspapers.

Paul was in charge of the advertising side of the operations. But it was the Averill Press that was "his baby," according to Mr. Averill's son-in-law,

at Birmingham Schools. "I've had a Christmas card from him every year."

Cap Hall of the Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association said Mr. Averill had good business judgement, good foresight, and an understanding of the community.

"PAUL WAS a very outstanding civic leader, especially so in the guidance that he brought to the BBAA in the early days," Hall said. "He knew the community and how to get things done."

But, in addition, Mr. Averill helped with the nitty-gritty details of BBAA events, according to Carolyn Hall. "He was right in there with his Bermuda shorts doing the wiring and setting up for parties," she said.

Machus said his friendship with Mr. Averill and his late wife, Mae, was cemented after Machus served a stint in World War II, was captured by the Italian Army and held in a prison camp.

"I was missing in action and a prisoner of war after that and they were very understanding and supportive of my wife," Machus said.

Machus, who said he owns a condominium in Florida, had frequently visited with his friend there. He tried to contact Mr. Averill when he arrived there Feb. 2 Machus said, but he was too ill.

"What matters most is how life is lived," Machus said. "Paul lived life to the fullest. He was a vital part of our Birmingham community, which he loved so much. He had a tremendous vitality and applied this to everything he ever did."

Henry Hogan, Averill Press grew into one of the area's largest independent printers, Hogan said.

George, who had the journalism background after a stint as a reporter on the Detroit Journal newspaper, retired from the business in 1961. He died 10 years later.

Paul Averill and Hogan bought out financial interest in The Eccentric in 1961, with Mr. Averill serving as publisher and Hogan as associate publisher.

During his decade as publisher, Mr. Averill introduced an "Arts of Living" section which has evolved into the Creative Living section.

HE RETIRED in 1971. Three years later the newspapers were sold and merged with the Observer newspapers.

"He had the ability to understand a community newspaper's function," said John W. Reddy, vice president/editorial, Suburban Communications Corp., parent company of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

"He wed the interest of the paper with the interest of the community," Reddy said. "He was a hell of a nice guy — very demanding but very people-oriented."

"He was a delight to know and a very caring person to the extent that he kept in touch with his employees, at least as far as I know he did," said former Eccentric reporter Barbara Underwood, now in the public relations department

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