GOP activist James Munn never lost case in law career

By Paysha Stockton
Seattle Times staff reporter

James Munn, a lawyer and prominent Republican organizer, loved to tell the tale of his 12 criminal cases.

As a King County prosecuting attorney in the early 1960s, he won six of six murder trials. Later, in private practice, he successfully defended six of six murder suspects. Then he called his criminal-law career quits.

"He went 12 for 12 in criminal law and decided he didn't have to do that anymore," said his son John Munn.

Mr. Munn, 79, died Sunday (June 30) of a heart attack. A Seattle resident for 40 years, he was active in Republican politics and local service organizations. He worked with many prominent politicians, including President Reagan, the first President Bush and U.S. Rep. Jennifer Dunn of Bellevue.

Kirby Wilbur, a KVI radio-show host, met Mr. Munn as a volunteering high-school student. In 1980, Wilbur headed the state's Young Republicans while Mr. Munn led the state's Reagan campaign committee.

Many party higher-ups thought kids were good only for stuffing envelopes and getting coffee, Wilbur said. But Mr. Munn always saw potential in the youths.

"Jim was very encouraging to young people in the party," Wilbur said. He gave them responsibility and allowed them to prove themselves. "He would ask our advice and opinion on things, and he meant it."

Mr. Munn was born in Deadwood, S.D., in 1923. He graduated from Piedmont High School in California and then joined the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1942.

He was a combat pilot until 1944, when his bomber was shot down and he was captured by the German army. A prisoner of war until 1945, he was later decorated with the Air Medal and Purple Heart.

He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1948, and served in the Korean War as an intelligence officer, winning a Bronze Star.

He fully retired from the military, after serving in the reserves, as a lieutenant colonel in 1973.

He married Marjory in 1953 on Okinawa, Japan.

Mr. Munn's second career began after he graduated from Gonzaga Law School and moved to Seattle in 1962. He started in the King County Prosecuting Attorney's Office and then joined the firm of Kargianis & Austin. In 1981, he started a business-consulting practice.

He continued to practice law until his death.
Mr. Munn was active in state and national Republican politics, serving as delegate or alternate to the national convention for 20 years.


In 1966, Mr. Munn ran unsuccessfully against Brock Adams for Congress. (They later became friends.) It was his only campaign.

"He was behind the scenes," John Munn said. "He wasn't in the limelight; he didn't really crave it. He didn't mind being behind the scenes and having folks call him for advice."

Mr. Munn was known for that advice, friends said.

Family friend Eamonn Noonan said the attorney was always willing to look over business documents and give free legal advice.

"He never charged me for anything," he said. "He had a very big heart. He was always there."

Wilbur said Mr. Munn was a straight shooter, a rarity in politics.

"Jim was always the type of guy I could go to in politics for honest advice or help," Wilbur said. "He didn't play games. He was a man of principle.

"He was truly about what was best and not what promoted him."

Mr. Munn is survived by his wife, Marjory; daughter, Susan Willden; sons, Kirk, John and Rob; and grandchildren, Shawna, Nathan, Heather, Ashley and Mallie. A memorial service and reception will be held at 11 a.m. next Saturday at the First Free Methodist Church on Queen Anne Hill in Seattle.