



## Harlan Gerpen

June 18, 1924 - October 21, 2012

Harlan Welbert Van Gerpen, 88, of Cedar Falls, Iowa, passed away Sunday, October 21, 2012, at the Western Home Communities in Cedar Falls. He was born June 18, 1924, in Avon, South Dakota, the son of William R. and Johanna (DeRoos) Van Gerpen. On August 20, 1950, he married Betty Jean Reynolds in Carrollton, Illinois. She died October 9, 2012.

Harlan served three years in WWII as a meteorologist in Europe and 16 months in the Korean conflict as an Aircraft Maintenance Officer. He earned a B.S. in 1949 from South Dakota School of Mines and received a M.S. in Electrical Engineering from the University of Illinois at Champaign-Urbana in 1950. He joined the John Deere Product Engineering Center in 1953 where he worked for 28 years, retiring as Manager of Technical Services in 1982. At Deere, he pioneered the first-known use of computers to design gears -- reducing a labor-intensive process requiring a week of manual calculations to 15 minutes.

In 1966, he was elected to the first Board of Directors for Hawkeye Community College where he served for sixteen years, including two years as Chairman of the Board. He also represented Deere for seven years on the Cedar Falls Chamber of Commerce, and he co-chaired the first Cedar Valley Economic Development Committee. He played a leadership role in the founding of Valley View Baptist Church and held virtually every office over the 50-year life of the church.

Following retirement, he was elected to the Iowa State Legislature for two

years and was a partner in Van Gerpen-Reece Engineering for 23 years. He served on the Iowa State Board of Education for three years and was a volunteer executive for the International Executive Service Corps in Albania and India. He and his wife enjoyed travelling to many countries around the world in their retirement years. Until his death, he remained actively involved with Hawkeye Community College (HCC) serving as a life-time member of the HCC Foundation Board. He was a member of Waterloo First Baptist Church. He is survived by his three daughters, JoAnna Van Gerpen of Cedar Falls, Sara (Dave) Bolender of Chewelah, WA, Mary (John) Smith of Wilmette, IL; two sons, Tom (Connie) of Davenport, and Jon (Mary Jo) of Moscow, ID; twelve grandchildren: Megan, Kathleen, Grace, Mary Faith and Elizabeth Smith, Katy (Eli) Bolender Gurash, Kristen (John) Bolender Robbins, and Kelsy Bolender, Stephen and Jay Van Gerpen, Jamie (Jason) Herring and Abby Van Gerpen; three great-grandchildren, Xander and Oliver Gurash and Sydney Robbins; a sister, Lucille (Jule) Waterman of Corsicana, TX, a brother, Edward (Sharon) Van Gerpen of Avon, SD, a sister-in-law, Louise Van Gerpen of Tyndall, SD, and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by a brother, Roland Van Gerpen.

Services will be held 11 a.m. Thursday, October 25, at First Baptist Church in Waterloo with burial in Fairview Cemetery, Cedar Falls, at 9:30 a.m. Thursday. Visitation will be from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, at Richardson Funeral Service. Memorials may be directed to the First Baptist Church in Waterloo, the Hawkeye Community College Van Gerpen Endowment for Gerontology, or Western Home Foundation. Condolences may be left at [www.richardsonfuneralservice.com](http://www.richardsonfuneralservice.com).

# Tribute Wall

ID

“ I am from India. I saw it inordinately late and somehow missed it before. Sir Harlan came to India as our consultant way back in 1994 and I can't forget my immortal learning from him on gear engineering. Certainly he is my demigod in the domain of engineering and I recall his "pearls of wisdom" even now- INDRANIL DASGUPTA, INDIA



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**INDRANIL DASGUPTA** - March 03, 2023 at 12:49 AM

RJ

“ We repeat what we wrote a few days ago. Harlan and Betty were charter members where we were the pastoral family for the first four years of Valley View's 50 year ministry. They were prime movers in that dynamic faith community. They were supportive parishioners and personal friends. One of Harlan's most recent legacies was his loving leadership role in the effective transitioning of Valley View Baptist Church. Our love to the Van Gerpens.

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**Rev. Quentin & Joann** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

BM

“ Sara and Dave and family, I was so sorry to read about the death of both your parents. It can't have been easy losing both of them so close together this month. My mother died almost 13 years ago, but my dad is well at 85. It appears that you have 3 daughters and 3 grandchildren as well. How wonderful! Tim and I have been in Grundy Center for 35 years. I'm still teaching. Tim works for Hy-Vee in Marshalltown. We have a son and wife in Seattle, so we have been out there a few times. My 2 daughters are both married and live in Norwalk (near Des Moines) and Iowa City. I have one 7 month old granddaughter. I hope things are well with you. I have fond memories of our time in Atalanta House! Barb Beimer Melloy

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**Barb Melloy** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

BW

“ Jon and Mary Jo,  
What a shock to have your dad's passing follow so closely on the heels of your mom's. God bless you all, as different memories and feelings ebb and flow. From the obituary, I see your dad was a fascinating man - a very special man. Travel safely, and I pray the funeral is a comfort to you and your family.  
--Barbara

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**Barbara Williams** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

MH

“ I am so sorry for your loss. I was a classmate of Mary. Prayers to you all.

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**Melissa (Hughes Anderson) Halvorson** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

MD

“ Van was great to work with.

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**Mike Diers** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

MT

“ Dear Mary, John, and all the beautiful Smith girls,  
We will keep you in our prayers for sometime to come. What beautiful lives of love and strength both your dad and mom had. How blessed you all are.  
Love and Prayers, Margie and Pat Tobin & Family

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**Margaret P Tobin** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

GG

“ When I first came to Waterloo from college, I learned and earned my stripes by working as an architect on Hawkeye governed by an extraordinary board of directors. Harlan, as the others, was so kind and generous and committed to making Hawkeye an extraordinary place. It stands today as a testament to those people. His legacy is amazing, and one to be followed.

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**Geof Grimes** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM

MC

“ Dear JoAnna and family, I am so sorry about the loss of your Mom and Dad in such a very short time. Just wanted you to know I was thinking about you all and holding you close in prayers.

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**Marlys Christiason** - March 29, 2013 at 02:49 PM