

Ernest Wilfred Wirtanen

Passed away peacefully August 6, 2010. Ernie is survived by his wife, Lavonne; son, Richard in Edmonton; niece, Marie (Bob) McKee; nephew, Dave (Pat) Wirtanen; grand nieces and nephews, Susan (Rob) Shemilt, Kathleen, Laura and Ross Wirtanen and great grand niece and nephew, Emily and Dean Shemilt of Victoria; grand nephew, Will (Wenhua) McKee of Ottawa and the Caldwell family of Vancouver and Edmonton. Ernie is also survived by Lavonne's family, Don, Dave (Amanda) and Rob Craigmyle, Peter Hildebrand, and grandchildren Meghan Hildebrand (Tony Colton), Holly (Mark) Lutkehaus, Riley Hildebrand, Sylvia (Simon) Cox, and Breanna Thompson. Ernie was predeceased by his first wife, Gladys; son, George; brothers, Bill, Peter and sisters Ena and Mary as well as Dereen Hildebrand. Ernie was born in Dollarton, B.C. on June 27, 1919 to Gustaf and Emily Wirtanen. The family moved to Victoria where Ernie's father was chief engineer for Cameron Lumber Company. Ernie was educated at Oaklands School and Victoria High School, class of 1935. His yearbook said he was a first class student especially at maths and a "budding electrician who talked of rewinding a few electric motors at night for something to do." His first job was as electrician at Cameron Lumber Company. Ernie trained at Milwaukee School of Engineering and received his BSc in Electrical Engineering in 1942. During the war years, he installed the electrical guidance system on Canadian Navy warships. He worked on several large power projects in Ontario for three years before joining Canadian General Electric in Winnipeg, Manitoba and then Fort William, Ontario, 1946-49. Ernie became Assistant Electrical Superintendent for Great Lakes Paper in Fort William, Ontario and then Resident Electrical Engineer at Eldorado Mining and Refining, Uranium City. In 1953 Ernie formed Wirtanen Electric Company Limited in Edmonton Alberta and lead the company for over 50 years. He semi-retired in 1995 but always kept his finger on the pulse of the company

from his office in his Victoria home. His son, George took over the company until his sudden death in 1999. Ernie founded the Wirtanen Electric Training Foundation in honour of his son recognizing the need to train underemployed or unemployed persons. Ernie was very proud that more than 95% of his graduates received jobs. His long time associates, John Gullion and Ann Burgess, continue this program. Many students of the school have written their sincere praise for the career help they have received through Ernie's initiative. He was a life member of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers, the Instrumentation Society of America, the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce, the Alberta Chamber of Resources, Past President of the Jellnick Society in Edmonton. He enjoyed his annual appearance as Santa Claus in Edmonton. Upon selling his electrical rental company, Ernie used his time and money to generously support many special projects and charities. He supported the George Wirtanen Training School, the Diabetes Foundation of Alberta, Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Milwaukee School of Engineering, Nova Scotia Training School in Tatamagouche, Habitat for Humanity, the Saanich Historical Artifacts Society, Pacific Sports, Victoria High School, Camosun College, the University of Victoria, Queen Alexandra Foundation, Mount Saint Mary Foundation, Trinity Presbyterian Church and many other local charities. In 2002, Ernie Wirtanen received the "Uncommon Friend" Award from the Alberta Chamber of Resources and in 2008 he was granted an Honorary Doctorate of Engineering from the Milwaukee School of Engineering. Ernie and Lavonne have enjoyed the care and support they have received from all the staff at Sunrise Assisted Living in Victoria.

A celebration of life will be held Thursday, August 12, 2:00 p.m. at MCCALL BROS. FLORAL CHAPEL, Johnson & Vancouver Streets, Victoria. The Rev. Rick Cleaver, Trinity Presbyterian Church will officiate. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Mt. St Mary Foundation, 861 Fairfield Road, Victoria, B.C., V8V 5A9, The Queen Alexandra Foundation, 2400 Arbutus

Road, Victoria, B.C., V8N 1V7 or George Pringle Memorial Camp,
932 Balmoral Road, Victoria,