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Dr. Joseph Iverson Riddle, Sr.

April 25, 1931 - May 9, 2017

On May 9, 2017, a life well-lived came to a peaceful close. Joseph Iverson Riddle was born on April 25, 1931 to Harry Lee Riddle, Sr. and Helen Atlanta Davis. Two beloved siblings, Judge Harry Lee “Chick” Riddle, Jr. and Mira Davis Riddle, pre-deceased him. Dr. Riddle grew up in Morganton, North Carolina, raised by a family steeped in the value of service to others. His life evidenced to the fullest that caring. He attended the McCallie School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, graduating Phi Beta Kappa. He went on to attend the School of Medicine at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, completing a residency in psychiatry with an emphasis in child psychiatry. Following a tour of duty in Charleston, South Carolina as a Lieutenant Commander in the United States Navy, Dr. Riddle returned to Morganton. There, he became, in 1962, the founding director of Western Carolina Center, a regional treatment facility for people with developmental disabilities.

It was as director of Western Carolina Center, now the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center, that Dr. Riddle’s caring became a calling. One of the country’s first psychiatrists to focus on the treatment of people with significant, life-long disabilities, his passion for excellence, penchant for ground breaking innovation, and ardent advocacy became near-legendary. Dr. Riddle directed the Center for 44 years,

until his retirement in 2006. In addition to his work there, he gave to his community and state in other ways. Dr. Riddle did pioneering work with children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), much of it in a weekly private practice; worked late nights for more than 25 years in the Foothills Mental Health Area Program; and treated young men at the Western Youth Institution (Foothills Correctional Institution) for 28 years. At various points, he was a member of the staff at Grace Hospital, Morganton, and the first physician member of its board of trustees, was the director of North Carolina's western regional mental health services; served as a charter member of both the North Carolina Child Advocacy Institute and the Governor's Advocacy Council on Children and Youth; directed Broughton Hospital and the North Carolina School for the Deaf at Morganton; founded a national organization for directors of state-funded developmental centers, chaired the Burke County School Board; and led the North Carolina Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services from 2000 to 2001. Dr. Riddle summed up his approach to his life's work this way: “When joy and happiness are added to individual[ized] attention... treatments are much more effective. Joy and happiness are the treatment of choice.” In his spare time, Dr. Riddle took great pleasure in renovating old cars, with his son, and in reading about the Civil War and WWII.

With his first wife, the late Caroline Huntley Riddle, he was the father of three children, all of whom survive him: Helen Catherine “Holly” Riddle of Chapel Hill; Ruth Riddle Jones of Morganton; and Joseph Iverson Riddle, Jr. (Beth), also of Morganton. Dr. Riddle and his second wife, Marsha Baxter Riddle, who also survives him, are the stepfather and mother, respectively, of Keith Milton Brown, II (Jeannine). A sister-in-law, Sally Best Riddle is also surviving. He was the proud grandfather of Stuart Wayne Robinson, Jr. (Kathy); Jacob Colter “Cole” Jones (Lisa); William Iverson Riddle; Soren Adrianus Harmsen; and]oseph Davis Riddle; and the great-grandfather of James and Sarah Robinson and Jacob and Gray Jones.

The family will receive friends from 5 to 8pm, Friday, May 12, 2017 at Sossoman Funeral Home (1011. S. Sterling Street, Morganton, NC 28655). A memorial service will be held at 11am, Saturday, May 13, 2017 at Bess Chapel United Methodist Church (6073 Flay Road, Cherryville, NC 28021) with the Rev. Bill Taylor and the Rev. Dr. Wade Dellinger officiating. A memorial celebration of Dr. Riddle’s life will also be held at the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center on Wednesday, May 17, 2017 at

2pm in the gymnasium (300 Enola Road, Morganton, NC 28655).

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the J. Iverson Riddle Developmental Center Chapel Fund or to Bess Chapel United Methodist Church, 2741 Hwy 274, Cherryville, NC 28021.

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family.

Tribute Wall

No tributes added yet.