

NEWS OBITUARIES

# Richard Menke, judge and outdoorsman

● The retired Scott County judge died on the Pacific Crest Trail. He found a passion in hiking after leaving the bench in 1997 and loved spending time in nature.

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Retired Scott County Judge Richard Menke, who also served in the Minnesota House of Representatives, died after a fall recently while hiking the Pacific Crest trail.

Menke's body was found Saturday near Mount Laguna, Calif.; the cause of the fall hasn't been determined.

Menke, 70, lived in Prior Lake with his wife, Judith, where the couple raised three daughters. His daughter Teri Menke of Tempe, Ariz., said her father "died doing exactly what he wanted to do. He loved outdoors, he loved nature."

The judge served in the state House as a DFLer from Prior Lake from 1971 through 1974, when Gov. Wendell Anderson appointed him to the bench. He retired in 1997 and took up hiking.

Menke's most famous case involved the sexual abuse of a 4-year-old, who didn't want to face the defendant in court, said court reporter Wayne Miller. Two-way video cam-

eras were installed. The defendant and the jury were in one room. Menke, Miller, the prosecutor, the child and the defense attorney were in another room for the testimony.

The man was convicted. His appeal of the victim's testimony arrangement went to the U.S. Supreme Court, but wasn't heard because the court upheld a similar arrangement in another case, Miller said.

Menke "was very thorough, very methodical when he wanted to do something," Miller said.

On the bench, he was known for consistency and a non-negotiable sentence of one weekend in jail for first-time drunken-driving offenders, said Miller and Scott County Judge Phil Kanning.

Menke hiked the Appalachian Trail thoroughly in 2003 after two attempts were aborted because of stress fractures. When he went back the third time, he started from the beginning so he could hike the trail from start to finish in one trip.

Kanning said his colleague took up marathon running at



Richard Menke took up running marathons at age 50, and in 2003 hiked the Appalachian Trail from start to finish.

age 50. He studied Chinese and would practice the characters on a scratch pad in his court office, Kanning said.

"Going 70 percent was not Dick Menke's way of doing anything," he said.

Out on the trails, Menke's name was "Recycled," because he was going through life again, Kanning said. "I can still see him pointing his finger at me and saying, 'You've got to do something like that when you get retired. You can't just sit' around," Kanning said.

Menke was born and raised in Jordan. He served in the U.S. Air Force.

In addition to his wife and daughter Teri, he is survived by two other daughters, Elizabeth and Jennifer; two brothers, James and Henry; and two grandchildren.

Services will be held 11 a.m. Tuesday at St. Michael's church, 16311 Duluth Av. SE. in Prior Lake. The calling period will be an hour before the service.