

Devoted to education and the U



« IF I HAD TO NAME ONE TRAIT FOR BOB, HE WAS CURIOUS AND HE HAD A LOT OF DIFFERENT INTERESTS. »

By DAVID PHELPS
david.phelps@startribune.com

Robert "Bob" Odegard was a man of many hats — farmer, naval officer, public official, businessman — but it was his love for education and the University of Minnesota for which he'll be remembered.

Odegard called education "the Lord's work" and served as executive director of the University of Minnesota Foundation for 33 years, eventually being bestowed with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree in 2000 that his children said was "the proudest day of his professional life."

Odegard, 92, died on Sept. 20, in Naples, Fla.

"He was a wonderful human being who made contributions in many different areas," said Minneapolis businessman Wheelock Whitney, who hired Odegard in the mid-1960s to work at the investment firm then known as Dain Bosworth. "If I had to name one trait for Bob, he was curious and he had a lot of different interests. The University of Minnesota was the ideal job for him."

Odegard grew up in Princeton, Minn., where he graduated from high school in 1938. He earned a degree in agricultural economics from the University of Minnesota

in 1942, then entered the U.S. Navy as an ensign. During officer's training in Virginia, he met and married his wife, Barbara Perkins. Odegard shipped out on the USS Rogers in 1945 and was in Tokyo Bay when the Japanese surrendered to end World War II.

After four years in the Navy and at the rank of lieutenant junior grade, Odegard returned to his Princeton home to farm. He also operated a Ford dealership, and in 1958 was elected to the Minnesota House for one term. He ran unsuccessfully for Congress in the Sixth District in 1962 and again in 1964 — the same year Whitney ran for Senate. Both Republicans were defeated in a Democratic landslide that year.

In 1970, Odegard became executive director of the university's foundation, the independent fundraising arm of the school, where he stayed on a full- and later part-time basis for more than 30 years.

His successor, Gerry Fischer, said Odegard helped the university through several capital drives that increased the school's endowed faculty positions, student aid and research funding.

"We moved from raising tens of millions of dollars to hundreds of millions of dollars," said the now-retired

Fischer. "Bob said capital development is a long series of rejections followed by a windfall for which you shouldn't take credit."

Over the course of his career, Odegard served on more than 20 business, civic and foundation boards, including public television station KTCA, Voyageur Funds and Norwest Bank.

"He was always a positive thinker and doer," said son Kevin Odegard. "His style was to spread the credit around."

An avid golfer, Odegard was a member of the Wayzata Country Club and the Audubon Country Club in Naples.

In a short biography, Odegard wrote: "How fortunate people are who find their place in life."

Minnesota services for Odegard will be held on Friday, Oct. 11, at Wayzata Community Church.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Barbara, in 1999; son Stephen in 1996; and companion Marge Nordbye in 2007.

He is survived by sisters Ruth Crassweller of Duluth, Phyllis Thompson of Corte Madera, Calif., and Bette Bunger of Princeton; daughters Susan Odegard Wood of Mount Gretna, Pa., and Nancy Odegard of Santa Monica, Calif.; son Kevin of Minneapolis and four grandchildren.