

Dean Emmett Lee

November 18, 1933 – September 27, 2020

Dean Emmett Lee, 86, of Mitchell, South Dakota, formerly of Forestburg, passed away Sunday, September 27, 2020, at Avera Brady Health and Rehab in Mitchell.

Dean was born November 18, 1933, at St. Joseph Hospital in Mitchell to Ralph and Clara (Fairfield) Lee. He attended the South Dakota School for the Deaf in Sioux Falls for 12 years, graduating in 1952. During his school years, he participated in basketball, football, track and student activities, serving as basketball captain and class president.



After graduation, Dean worked as a farm laborer for several years. He later farmed in partnership with his brother, Richard, known as Tom, raising cattle and putting up hay. Even after retiring, he continued helping neighbors with farm work.



District 18 Champs
L to R: Ken Czerny, Bob Ellis, Dana Dillman, Coach Roy Holcomb, Jerrold Berke, Dean Lee, and Walter Baumgartner.

Dean loved the outdoors. He helped provide habitat for pheasants and was an avid deer hunter. At his home northeast of Forestburg, he enjoyed feeding and watching birds. He was often seen driving his pickup with his black Labrador companion riding in the back.

A longtime sports fan, Dean enjoyed watching baseball, basketball and football on television and attending Dakota Wesleyan and Sanborn Central games. He also enjoyed playing cards at the local pub, sharing conversation over a chili dog and a beer, and seeing whether he could win a few dollars. His mother affectionately described this favorite pastime as "putting his feet under the table."

Education held a special place in Dean's heart. In 1998, he established the Dean Lee Scholarship Fund at the South Dakota School for the Deaf to help a graduating senior continue their education and provide elementary classrooms with needed supplies. He was invited back each year to attend graduation and present the scholarship and a monetary gift.



His generosity also benefited students in his local community. In 2003, he contributed to the Artesian, Letcher and Forestburg schools to help purchase land for a new, centrally located school in Forestburg.

Dean formed lifelong friendships in the Forestburg community. As a child, he brought home sign language alphabet cards so his friends could learn to communicate with him. Over the years, they communicated through fingerspelling, gestures, lip-reading and written notes.



Photo credit to Mitchell Republic Newspaper

Friends remembered his hunting skills, sharp memory at the pinochle table and playful sense of humor. He also served as an umpire for the town baseball team.

In 2013, Dean moved to Countryside Living in Mitchell, where he developed close friendships with residents and staff. He enjoyed getting coffee and desserts for others and entertaining friends with his hats and holiday decorations. His familiar notebook and pen helped him share stories and keep up with the local news. He appreciated the friendships and care he received at Countryside Living and later at Avera Brady.Dean is survived by his cousins and many friends. He was preceded in death by his parents; an infant brother, James; and his brother, Richard "Tom" Lee.

Funeral services were held on October 2, 2020, at Bittner Funeral Chapel in Mitchell, with Pastor Richard Poppen officiating. Visitation took place one hour before the service. Musical selections included "In the Garden" by Alan Jackson and "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" by Patsy Cline.

Pallbearers were Amy Olson, Kayla Olson, Terry Torgerson, Troy Olson, Trevor Olson and Jerry Johnson. Honorary pallbearers were LaMoine Torgerson, Curt Rees, Pat Kiner, Jeff Rieckman, Darrell Olson, Jack Theeler, Elroy Gruenewald and Lyle Jastram.

Burial followed at Mt. Pleasant Cemetery in Artesian, South Dakota. Family and friends were invited to gather afterward for fellowship and a luncheon at Bittner Funeral Chapel.

Memorials were designated to the Sanborn Central Scholarship Foundation. In recognition of Dean's love of hunting, those attending his services were welcomed to wear hunting attire.

