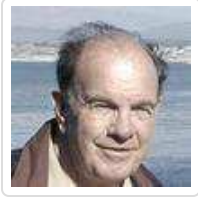


Philip Baker Benefiel



CHAMPAIGN — Philip Baker Benefiel, 95, died Sunday, April 7, 2019, at [home](#) in Champaign.

Judge Benefiel was born June 25, 1923, in Lawrenceville, to Ross J. and Amanda Jane (nee Baker) Benefiel. He attended Lawrenceville public schools and the University of Illinois. During World War II, Philip served in the 667th Field Artillery Battalion at the Battle of the Bulge and the Rhine Crossing at Remagen. Upon his return to the UI after the war, Philip completed a bachelor's degree in [history](#), followed by a J.D. in law in 1948. Returning home to Lawrenceville, Philip was elected as state's attorney of Lawrence County and served in that position from 1948-1952. At the time, Philip was the youngest Democrat in the U.S. to serve as state's attorney, a post contested and won in an Illinois Supreme Court case due to his having been elected prior to successful completion of the bar [exam](#)!

Philip married the love of his life, Mary K., in 1958, becoming a second father to her sons, John Mark and Matt Ashbrook. Over the next seven years, Philip and Mary K. had three more children, Ann Claire, Philip Ross and Daniel Benefiel. In 1964, Philip was elected to the Illinois Senate. There he was [awarded](#) the Best Legislator Award along with his friends and colleagues, Alan Dixon and Paul Simon, both of who went on to serve as U.S. Senators from Illinois, and one of who was a candidate for president. Philip served as a local attorney in Lawrenceville until elected in 1968 as an associate judge and later as circuit judge of the 2nd Circuit, where he served continuously until 1991. During his law career, Judge Benefiel served as president of the Illinois Judges Association, as chief judge of the 2nd Judicial Circuit, and on the Judicial Inquiry Board.

He was a lifelong member of First Christian Church of Lawrenceville and an active member of the Lawrence County Democrats and Kiwanis.

Philip's lifelong passion, though, was in social justice. In 1970, with Mary K., he founded Volunteers in Probation (VIP), which supported at-risk youth with community mentors. As this model was adopted by adjacent Wabash and Crawford Counties, the name was changed to Cra-Wa-La Volunteers in Probation, an organization which served approximately 1,100 youth over nearly 50 years. He was also active in juvenile justice programs in Chicago, including the Near Northwest Civic Committee and Chicago Area Project. The Judge never met a teen or adult in whom he didn't see value and promise. In his later years, Philip served as Democratic precinct committeeman for Lawrence County, managed Mary K.'s campaigns for Unit 20 School Board, and actively supported the local campaigns of a number of area political candidates.

Philip is survived by his five children and their spouses, John and Jan Ashbrook of Champaign, Matt and Nadine Ashbrook of Monee, Ann Benefiel and Joe Kunkel of Champaign, Phil and Trudy Benefiel of Mount Carmel and Daniel Benefiel of Morgan Hill, Calif.; 11 grandchildren and their partners, Jonathan and Kimberly Keniley-Ashbrook of Homer, Nicholas and Grace Ashbrook of Dubuque, Chelsea and Don McCarthy of Park Ridge, Matthew Scott Ashbrook of St. Petersburg, Fla., Alex Kunkel of Tampa, Fla., Ian Kunkel and Corinn Waltz of Asheville, N.C., Anthony Kunkel at the University of Colorado, Joshua Stevenson and Dylan Benefiel, both of Mount Carmel, Jesse Benefiel at Portland State University, and Sophia Benefiel of Morgan Hill, Calif.; 11 great-grandchildren, Ethan, Owen, Aiden and Atticus Ashbrook, Brenden and Jackson McCarthy, Brody, Holden and Jensen Ashbrook, and Caleb and Katie Stephenson; and three loyal caregivers, Taiwan Lee, Pamela Martin and Lisa Morgan.

He was preceded in death by two infant brothers, William Ross and Paul Jesse; parents, Ross and Amanda; many dear friends; and his wife and life partner, Mary K. Benefiel.