

## Former Southington probate judge Carl Sokolowski dies at 89

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Carl Sokolowski in 1998.



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By Jesse Buchanan, Record-Journal staff

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SOUTHINGTON — Colleagues, family and community members remembered longtime probate judge Carl Sokolowski as a thoughtful man and father who cared deeply about his town.

Sokolowski died Thursday at the age of 89. The son of Polish immigrants, Sokolowski moved to Plantsville when he was in elementary school.

Most local residents know Sokolowski as the town's probate judge, a position he held for more than two decades. His daughter Janet Samuelson said she's heard from town residents about her father's impact both as a judge and as a volunteer for numerous organizations.

"I didn't realize how many lives he touched until he got ill," Samuelson said. She and her father received visitors in the area hospitals. "People would come in and say, 'You may not remember but you helped my mom with some difficult situations that she had legally.'"

Sokolowski chose not to run again for probate judge in 1998 since he was turning 70 the next year. State law prohibits probate judges from holding office after they reach that age.

He stayed in contact with subsequent probate judges even after the position was combined with the Cheshire probate district. Matt Jalowiec, elected to the newly combined seat in 2010, received a letter from Sokolowski congratulating him.

"He was thoughtful like that," Jalowiec said. "It was a nice welcome."

Letter-writing was a strength of Sokolowski who would travel with pre-addressed envelopes for his family and collected antique inkwells. His children and grandchildren have notes, letters and postcards sent by Sokolowski over the years.

"He wrote religiously to all of us, to his grandkids," Samuelson said. "He was that kind of thoughtful."

Sokolowski was born in Albion, New York several years before his family moved to Connecticut for work. He, his parents and brother survived the Hartford Circus Fire in 1944 which killed more than 150.

Sokolowski joined the Navy at age 17. He spent 10 years in the service where he met his wife, Ensign Melita Snyder. With the aid of the G.I. Bill, Sokolowski attended Yale Law School and after practicing in Washington D.C. for two years moved back to Southington. He was elected probate judge in 1975.

Samuelson is the oldest of Sokolowski's three daughters. She recalled him as a kind, good father who took time with his children and also with his grandchildren, each of whom he took

father who took time with his children and also with his grandchildren, each of whom he took on a trip. Upon hearing he was ill, the grandchildren traveled from around the country to visit him.

“He participated in their life on all kinds of levels,” Samuelson said.

Sokolowski met his first great-granddaughter in August.

Through the years Sokolowski was involved with the American Legion Post 72, Polish Falcons, the Rotary Club, charter revision commissions, the former Savings and Loan Association of Southington, the Bradley Memorial board of trustees, and the Southington United Way, among other groups.

Phil Wooding, the town historian, took over his position from Sokolowski who was a family friend as well as a fellow volunteer with the Southington Historical Society. The two worked on identifying places and people in historic photographs.

“He was a tremendous resource for accomplishing that by virtue of his interest in town history and knowledge of people who had contributed to the town,” Wooding said.

Despite having his own legal practice and serving as probate judge, Wooding recalled Sokolowski spending time at the Calendar House and other locations explaining probate issues to town residents.

“He did a lot of that kind of work,” Wooding said.

Wooding knew Sokolowski his entire adult life and described him as gracious and unassuming.

“I’m really going to miss him,” Wooding said.

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