

Crichton: 'The fights are never over,' he says

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manities Speakers Bureau.

Crichton was active in the Last Chance Peacemakers in Helena and then the Montana Low-Income Coalition, where he quickly became director after several resignations. He moved to Billings in 1988 to work for the defeat of Constitutional Amendment 18, allowing the Legislature to restrict eligibility for public assistance.

The amendment passed, but it was defeated in Billings. He and Kate had found a house in Fromberg, and in August 1988 Crichton was offered a job as full-time director of the Montana ACLU chapter, in Billings, which for its first seven years had had only a part-time director.

And that's the position Crichton held for 28 years, building a statewide organization and forging partnerships with lawyers willing to donate their time to ACLU crusades. One of Crichton's

first initiatives was to host a series of "Jefferson Meetings" across the state, trying to convince people wary of the ACLU "that there's nothing subversive at all about wanting to support the First Amendment."

The Montana chapter had very few resources in those early days. Crichton said his Curly and Kate travels, paid for by the Speakers Bureau, became his de facto vehicle for getting around the state on behalf of the ACLU. Sometimes there were clashes between the music and his ACLU work.

In 1991, he said, he and Kate were supposed to perform in Deer Lodge, where, in the aftermath of the prison riot that year, the ACLU was deeply unpopular for defending the rights of some of the prisoners involved in the riot. Kate didn't want to play there at all, but Crichton talked her into it.

"OK," she said, "but we'll sleep in Butte."

The Montana ACLU had some signal accomplishments, including an effort to require the creation of legislative districts comprising a majority of Native Americans voters.

"Finally," Crichton said, "someone was asserting that the federal voting rights law applied to Native Americans."

Another legal victory gave access to health insurance to same-sex partners of Montana University System employees. Another resulted in the creation of a statewide public defender system. Despite that victory, Crichton is convinced the state has deliberately underfunded the public defender system since its creation 10 years ago.

"Like all civil liberties, the fights are never over," he said.

Helena lawyer Ron Waterman has worked with the Montana ACLU since the prison riot of 1991, handling cases involving prisoner rights, death penalty abolition and jail reform. He said one of Crichton's achievements has been working to bring about change without having to take government agencies to court.

Most people, including government officials, "really do want to do what's fair and just," Waterman said, but they work with limited budgets and they have constituents with priorities that don't always match those of the ACLU. He said Crichton is always open to working with people, trying to find ways of, say, bringing jails into compliance with modern standards with-

out breaking the bank.

"That's Scott's skill," Waterman said. "He's very good at working with people."

Welch, the Montana LGBT advocacy coordinator, said Crichton is something of a legend within the ACLU, revered and respected across the country for his experience, his lifetime of activism and his ability to get so much done in a generally conservative, sparsely populated state.

Board member Taylor credit's Crichton's leadership for the decision by the national ACLU to make Montana one of five affiliates to receive an "enhancement grant" in 2008. Montana became the first small chapter to hire a staff lawyer, and Crichton, who worked alone or just with office help for so long, now has a staff of 6 1/2 positions statewide, with several other people doing work for the ACLU but funded by other organizations.

After Crichton and Kate split up, he decided there was no reason to keep the state headquarters in Billings. Crichton said he was driving 30,000 miles a year, mostly because his presence was so often needed in Helena. He moved there with the office in 2003.

That's where he met Gwen Florio, then a reporter covering the Capitol for the Great Falls Tribune after many years as a national and international reporter. When she took a job with the Missoulian, he moved the office again. Florio has since quit journalism and is doing well as a novelist, having recently signed a contract to write three new mysteries.

Florio and Crichton live up Rattlesnake Creek in Missoula, and one of his post-ACLU goals is to do more traveling with Florio.

Crichton doesn't think his successors will have any lack of work to do. He is worried about the increasing meshing of religion and politics, and concerned about the insidious effects of money, particularly "dark money," on politics. And there will be endless work to do in regard to what he calls the "prison-industrial complex we have immersed ourselves in."

Waterman said one key to Crichton's effectiveness was that his many interests were grounded in one idea.

"Scott's passion deals with making sure 'liberty and justice for all' means what it says ... to make sure that what we see as the promise is equal to what we see as the reality," he said.

Welch said she has been consistently impressed by Crichton's "deep level of personal conviction."

"I've met a lot of people who work the mission," she said. "He lives it."

DEATHS

Chuck Ackerman

Charles "Chuck" W. Ackerman, 62, who had a talent for repairing violins, died Saturday, March 14, 2015 in Billings of cancer.

He was born March 15, 1952, in Dickinson, N.D., the son of Earl and Rosella Ackerman and brother to Nancy Volesky, Denys Ackerman, Sandy Ackerman, Dan Ackerman and Tom Ackerman. He lived the majority of his life in Billings.

He had a talent for building and repairing, especially violins. He also had a passion for preparing, cooking and catering food.

Survivors include his parents, siblings, nieces and nephews.

A Vigil Service will be at 6:30 p.m. Thursday, March 26. Memorial services will be at 11 a.m. Friday, March 27, both at Dahl Funeral Chapel. Inurnment will



CHUCK ACKERMAN

Douglas McGregor

Douglas Walter McGregor, 84, who with his wife founded and operated the Shiloh and Rimrock veterinary clinics, died March 21, 2015, after a long illness.

He was born April 15, 1930, to Floyd and Adeline McGregor. He grew up in Sheridan, Mont., and attended the University of Montana, where he met his wife of 59 years, Barbara Bartels.

They moved to Ames, Iowa, where he received a degree in veterinary medicine. In 1963 they moved to Billings, where they started and operated both the Shiloh and Rimrock veterinary clinics.

Mr. McGregor served as a signalman in the Navy during the Korean War during the first testing of the hydrogen bomb at the Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean. He earned several medals and was honorably discharged.

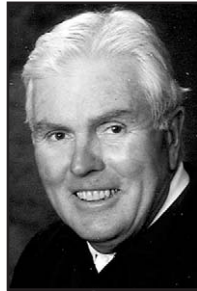
Every year he held a family reunion and golf tournament called the McGregor Open, which he usually won.

He had received care from the Frontier Cancer Center.

Survivors include his wife; sons, Stephen, Byron, John and Mike; daughters, Kathy and Jennifer; 10 grandchildren; and several great-grandchildren.

A vigil was held March 24 at Dahl Funeral Chapel. Memorial Mass was held March 25 at St. Pius X Catholic Church. Inurnment will be in Sheridan this summer.

Donations may be made to The First Tee Montana or St. Pius X Church, or charity of choice.



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Billings: Recipe for a book

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planned at this point, and I know who's going to die in each. It's kind of disturbing that killing people has become my new hobby."

Both Budewitz and Webber have new books on the horizon. First up for Budewitz is the "Food Lovers" series next installment, which will be out in July. Set at a food-lover's film festival, the book is titled "Butter Off Dead."

In addition, the next entry in her "Spice Shop" series, "Guilty as Cinnamon," will be out by the end of the year.

Webber also has big plans. She is considering possible ideas for a new se-

ries. One is set in Hawaii while another would revolve around Dale Evans, the fan-favorite attorney/goat farmer featured in "Killer Retreat."

Meanwhile, she'll continue to send Kate and Bella on adventures. The third installment in the "Downward Dog" series, "Karma's a Killer," will be out in January while the fourth book, "A Twisted Death," will arrive a year later. That novel will be in a setting familiar to Budewitz's fans: Pike Place Market.

"You should have them stop by the spice shop!" Budewitz suggested.

"That'd be really fun. Sounds like a recipe for a great book to me!" Webber replied with a laugh.

PAID ADVERTISING ANNOUNCEMENT

Huge Public Lands 'Lottery' Opens To All In April

(SPECIAL) Hundreds of individuals will win valuable oil and gas leases on public lands in upcoming auctions and lottery drawings. The purpose of winning is for both generous up-front cash profits, along with ongoing fixed royalties that can provide sizable monthly in-comes that can continue for several generations. Incredibly, most will risk just a small tax-deductible fee to enter this little-known program offering highly favorable odds for success. Complete information will be rushed to you by return mail by simply leaving your name and mailing address at: 206-347-8352. Immediate links to informative websites will be likewise provided by calling the automated phone number (206-347-8352 - available 24/7). Entry details and enrollment forms will be rushed without obligation, to meet the upcoming April 2015 closing deadline. Don't miss this per-haps one time opportunity to participate now.