

Merritt C. Horning, M.D.

1915 - 2005



Merritt C. Horning, M.D., F.I.C.S., M.P.H., a third generation Chicoan passed away July 1, 2005 at the ranch where he was born in Butte Creek Canyon outside of Chico. He was 90 years old.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Frank and Jesse Horning, his sisters Dorothy Horning and Ivy Hawkins, and two brothers, Frank Horning and Fulton Horning. He is survived by his wife of 63 years, Beverly June Horning; brothers Melvin Horning of Durham and Wendell Horning of Chico; sons Merritt Charles Horning Jr. of Newport Beach, Philip D. Horning, DDS and wife Angie of Chico; daughter Kathleen Renee Klein and husband David of Berthoud, CO; 16 grandchildren; 4 great-grandchildren; and many nieces and nephews including Dave and Dan Walters who were raised by Dr. and Mrs. Horning.

One of seven children, he was born in Butte Creek Canyon on April 28, 1915. His childhood and youth during the Great Depression was one of hard times and hard work. Because of financial difficulties for his parents, chicken feed was a staple on their table one winter. As an adult, the hard times ended but the work ethic taught to him from childhood remained compelling in every aspect of his life.

Dr. Horning, a founder of the Feather River Hospital in Paradise spent his life in the health care field. Many years of general medical practice and surgery convinced him that prevention of disease was the overwhelming need in the modern world, and that proper nutrition and lifestyle modification were the keys to disease prevention. He spent the last thirty years of his career conducting research, and working with institutions focused on teaching people to live and benefit from healthy lifestyles.

He graduated from Chico High School and was Student Body President. In December 1934 he earned the first full scholarship awarded nationwide by Montgomery Ward's Catalogue Division and used it to finish his pre-medical courses at Pacific Union College where he graduated in 1938. During his college years he worked summers for the U.S. Forest Service in Plumas County. In 1942 Dr. Horning graduated from the College of Medical Evangelists (now Loma Linda University).

On September 6, 1942, he married Beverly June Rogers.

He served his medical internship at Sacramento County Hospital from 1942-43, and then set up a general medical practice in Chico in 1943. In 1945 Dr. Horning took graduate studies in obstetrics and gynecology in Chicago.

In the late 1940's, he spearheaded a group comprised of himself, Dr. Dean Hoiland and Dr. Charles C. Landis, to start the Feather River Sanitarium and Hospital (now Feather River Hospital) in Paradise, CA. Dr. Horning served as the hospital's first Chief of Staff and Medical Director from 1950-1963.

In 1954 Dr. Horning started Lassen Foundation, a non-profit nutrition research foundation dedicated to establishing a scientific basis for the connection between diet, lifestyle and chronic degenerative illnesses such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. For many years he was President of the Foundation and remained Chairman of the Board until his death.

In 1957 he returned to Chicago and trained as a surgeon at Cook County Graduate School of Medicine, earning his Fellowship in the International College of Surgeons. From 1972 until 1974 Dr. Horning worked with the Pritikin

Longevity Center in Santa Barbara. In 1973 he completed his Masters in Public Health at Loma Linda University.

Dr. Horning designed and built the Colorado Health Educational Center, a health rehabilitation center in Lafayette, Colorado. He and his wife Beverly ran it from 1974 until 1980 when he returned to the Chico area.

Over the years he has served as:

Member, Board of Councilors, Loma Linda University, for 34 years

Chairman of Nutritional Research Program, Loma Linda Foods, for 8 years

Research Associate, Loma Linda University School of Health, for 15 years

Member, Board of Directors, Feather River Hospital

Member, Board of Directors, Weimar Institute, Weimar, CA

Member, Executive Committee, California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

Elder and church board member, Paradise Seventh-day Adventist Church

Vice President, Seventh-day Adventist Association of Self-Supporting Institutions

Member, Advisory Board, North Valley Community Foundation, Chico, CA

President of the Organization to restore the Honey Run Covered Bridge

Guest lecturer, California State University, Chico, Health Education Department

Guest speaker, Butte County historical societies and museums

Author and co-author of numerous published scientific articles

Dr. Horning always said it was more blessed to give than to receive, and he gave generously of his time, his skill, and his love to all those with whom he came in contact. His outlook was always positive; he always saw the good in everyone. Concerned about soil depletion and its impact on health, Dr. Horning through Lassen Foundation dedicated many years to researching soil amendments that would maximize the nutrition content of produce. His dream was to see human beings take responsibility for their own health so that each could live a long and healthy life. He considered this his "commission from the Lord," and it guided his activities all of his life. Many have chosen to follow his guidance and as a result had many productive and healthy years added to their lives.

Dr. Horning will always be remembered by his family and friends for his kind gentle manner, service to others, and unfaltering commitment to health.

Private interment was held Saturday, July 2, 2005, at the Centerville Cemetery. Memorial services will be held Sunday, July 17, 2005, at 10:30 AM at the Paradise Seventh-day Adventist Church. The family would like to invite anyone and everyone who has been touched in some way by Merritt Horning, physician, father, friend...

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to Lassen Foundation, 45 Jan Court, Suite 175, Chico, CA 95928.

