

Urbana attorney remembered for stately demeanor

By **DON DODSON**

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URBANA — Friends and associates remember Urbana attorney Stanley Balbach as a man whose stately demeanor and sense of professional ethics impressed others.

Mr. Balbach, who died Monday at age 92, was a key founder of Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund and the inspiration for many attorney-affiliated title-insurance funds across the nation.

For decades, he was a champion of better trans-



BALBACH

portation systems — particularly improved air service — for Champaign-Urbana.

Peter Birnbaum, president and CEO of Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund, said Mr. Balbach spent "probably 50 percent of his time" getting that organization up and running.

Today the company operates in Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin and has annual revenues of \$30 million. It facilitates the issuance of title insurance by lawyers, providing real-estate buyers with both a lawyer's advice and insured title to their property.

"He never made a penny off it. He did it all for free," Birnbaum said.

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When Birnbaum asked Mr. Balbach about that, he said, "What I'm doing is good for the legal profession and also good for the consumer. The fact that I could get this up and running, the fact that it's a success — that's my payment, that's my joy, that I could see it flourish."

Birnbaum said that showed the depth of Mr. Balbach's character.

Mr. Balbach's chiseled face, omnipresent bow tie and courtly demeanor made a deep impression on those who encountered him.

"He had the sort of face that should be on money, a Mount Rushmore face," Birnbaum said, adding it was one entirely appropriate for a \$50 bill.

Attorney Ward McDonald, a former president of Attorneys' Title, called Mr. Balbach "the most persistent man I ever knew."

"We had so many doors slammed in our face" in advancing the idea of Attorneys' Title, McDonald said, citing resistance from lawyers, lenders, real estate brokers and the bar association. "But we forged our way through."

McDonald said Mr. Balbach once advised him to decide first where to live and then what to do for a living.

"He said, 'As far as I'm concerned,

Champaign-Urbana is the garden spot of the nation. We chose to live here; it was not a job assignment.'"

Susan McLane worked with Mr. Balbach for 42 years, first at the Urbana law firm of Webber, Balbach, Thies and Follmer and later at Attorneys' Title Guaranty Fund.

"Those ethics he had — he's from that 'Greatest Generation,'" she said, noting that he served as a captain in the Army Air Corps during World War II.

That discipline served him well in his law profession, and he put what he learned about teamwork and camaraderie into practice, she said.

"I never saw that man in a pair of jeans or khaki pants," she said. "He'd

take his family to Pikes Peak — he must have worn something besides a suit, but maybe not."

For the record, Mr. Balbach's son Byron — also an Urbana attorney — said his dad didn't wear a suit when they visited the Rockies. But bow ties were his dad's trademark, and Mr. Balbach was given one by another bow-tie fancier, U.S. Sen. Paul Simon.

Mr. Balbach and his wife, Sarah, were married for 68 years. Birnbaum said "they were just really a great team ... they supported each other in a really nice way."

A memorial service and reception for Mr. Balbach will be from 2 to 4 p.m. Nov. 26 at the Windsor of Savoy.