

## **Richard F. (Dick) Metko**

Age 72, passed away Tuesday, April 20, 2004. He was born September 20th, 1931 in Mattoon, Wisconsin, son of the late William "Bill" and Esther (Waldvogel) Metko. On March 12th, 1970 Dick married Mary Ann Knatzke.

In 1935, Dick moved from Mattoon to Appleton with his parents, where he began accordion lessons at age seven. By 1941, he was entertaining his neighbors, playing for house parties, and soon graduated to a weekly feature on the WHBY Radio Sunday music program. At age 13, Dick was the youngest Wisconsin musician to be granted union membership by the American Federation of Musicians. While attending a radio broadcast featuring Lawrence Duchow and the Red Raven Orchestra on Easter Sunday 1946, Dick met the legendary band leader and soon joined the band. Still in high school, Dick played an average of six dance dates each week, and participated in recording sessions for RCA Victor. In addition to live performances and studio recordings, Dick constantly wrote new material for the band to record, including "Dick's Polka" and "Ha Ha! Ho Ho!". Both were distributed by RCA Victor and released as sheet music by Hill & Range Songs. "Dick's Polka," in particular, quickly became a favorite of accordion teachers and students alike.

In 1953, Dick formed his own band, Dick Metko and His Boys. During this time, he also became a national spokesman for PANcordion, based in New York, and landed a weekly feature on WFRV-TV. He organized several "Battle of the Bands" doubles with his lifelong friend Dick Rodgers, which would later develop into a thriving partnership in 1958. That same year, Dick joined Appleton-based welding giant Miller Electric, where he managed the company publication "Memco News" until his retirement in 1995.

The Metko-Rodgers partnership resulted in the release of two highly successful albums on two regional labels that caught the attention of executives at Decca Records. Several nationally distributed albums followed, along with a Sunday morning program on WBAY-TV that grew "into franchised stations dotting the entire northern tier of states and dipped down into the country's central section, and special appearances with such legends as Louie Armstrong, Johnny Cash, Frankie Yankovic and Don Ho. Rodgers and Metko toured together nonstop for 20 years with many talented musicians, canvassing North America and Europe.

In 1979, Dick joined his lifelong friend Westy in Duane Westphal and the Regals. For the next 12 years, they performed constantly and released several albums independently. The 1990s brought numerous musical opportunities for Dick, including

appearances with good friends Fritz Willfahrt, Alvin Styczinski and Gary Kuchenbecker, induction into the Wisconsin Polka Hall of Fame, and studio work recording commercial jingles and independent soundtracks. He was also a key element in the formation of the Lawrence Duchow Tribute Band in 1996 and regularly participated in the Thursday night polka jams at Christopher Allen's in Dale.

A longtime member of the National Rifle Association, Dick was an excellent marksman and an aficionado of antique guns. His great appreciation for nature and the environment inspired him to join the National Arbor Day Foundation, and he spent much of his free time tending to the trees he planted. Dick's other hobbies included reading, spending time 'up north' with his family, watching western movies and listening to country music.

Dick enjoyed a successful music career that spanned six decades, and shared his natural talents as a performer and writer to bring happiness to many people. His unique playing technique is matched by no one and will never be duplicated by another accordionist.

Survivors include his wife of 34 years, Mary Ann; three daughters: Pam and her husband Peter, Sarah and her special friend Christopher, Robyn and her husband/Dick's road manager Chad; a son, Scott and his wife Kay; two grandchildren: Alexis and Miles; two sisters: Dorothy and Carol; aunts, uncles, cousins, extended family, many friends, band mates and very special friend Max the Dog.

The Mass of the Resurrection will be at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, April 26th at Most Precious Blood Catholic Church, 808 S. Pearl Street, New London, Dick's church of 35 years. Friends may call Sunday, April 25th from 2 to 8 p.m. at Lewin Funeral Home, 210 W. Main Street, Fremont, and again Monday directly at the church from 9:30 a.m. until the hour of service. There will be a prayer and scripture service on Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at the funeral home.

Dick's family would like to thank the staff of Carolina Manor for the care he received. A memorial fund has been established with the Alzheimer's Association.