

James E. Luginbill: Former mayor dies (3/30/05)

Three-term Portland Mayor James E. Luginbill, who spearheaded economic development efforts bringing hundreds of jobs to Jay County, died Tuesday night at Swiss Village, Berne. He was 89.

A Sagamore of the Wabash, Luginbill received the Russell G. Lloyd Distinguished Service Award from the Indiana Association of Cities and Towns in 1987. He was the first recipient of the Portland Area Chamber of Commerce's Citizen of the Year Award, receiving the honor in 1986. A two-term member of the Portland City Council in the 1960s, he was elected mayor in 1979 and won re-election to two more terms.

During his terms as mayor, two industrial parks were established in Portland and firms such as FCC (Indiana), Alphabet Inc., and Fort Recovery Industries were attracted to the community. Luginbill's terms also saw the expansion of Portland Municipal Airport, the extension of Morton Street north to county road 100 north, major drainage work on the city's west side and construction of a new water plant.

In retirement he moved to Swiss Village. There he served as treasurer of the Adams County Community Foundation and as a member of the Swiss Village residents' association board. He was named a director emeritus of the Adams County Community Foundation in 1998.

"What I admired about Mayor Jim was his passionate and visionary approach to city government," Portland Mayor Bruce Hosier said this morning. "His fingerprints are all over many positive things ... and we as a community should be very appreciative of that." Hosier said flags at all city-owned facilities will be flown at half-staff until Luginbill is laid to rest.

Former Jay County Development Corporation executive director Richard Heupel, who worked closely with Luginbill in the 1980s, praised his commitment to economic growth. "He marshaled all of the city's resources toward attracting investment and jobs to Jay County and represented the absolute best of what any economic development director, and I think any citizen, could hope for in a municipal leader," Heupel said today.

"Jim provided Portland with exceptional leadership during some very difficult times," said Portland Area Chamber of Commerce executive director Vicki Tague this morning. "The fruits of his dedication to Portland are being reaped today and will continue to be recognized in the future."

Born on June 25, 1915, in Berne, he was the son of Wilbert and Lovina (Nussbaum) Luginbill. As a child, he spoke Swiss at home, not learning English until he attended

school. A 1932 graduate of Berne High School, he attended Wheaton College in 1937, later transferring to International Business College where he graduated in advanced accounting.

He moved to Portland in 1940, joining The Jay Garment Company, where he would work until his retirement in 1979 as company treasurer. He was married on May 23, 1946 to Jean Ronald Graham. She died on May 8, 1990. A former member of the Jay Garment Board of Directors, he also served on the board of the Graphic Printing Company and was the company's treasurer.

A World War II veteran, Luginbill was assigned to the Army Air Corps and was involved in transporting paratroopers and gliders for the D-Day invasion of France.

He was a member of First Presbyterian Church of Portland, where he served in a number of church leadership positions over the years.

An amateur photographer, cook and winemaker, he was a past member of the Portland Rotary Club and the Berne Rotary Club. He was also past president of the Indiana Republican Mayors Association.

In 2001, Luginbill went public with his Parkinson's disease, saying he wanted to approach his death with dignity. "We're all gonna be gone someday," he said then. "We're all here temporarily. I just want to set a good example of how you can get along with anything."

Surviving are two sons, John Luginbill, Cincinnati, Ohio, and Craig Luginbill, Millington, Ill.; a daughter, Julie Anne Turngren, San Francisco, Calif.; a brother, Howard Luginbill, Berne; a sister, Helen I. Liechty, Berne; and four grandchildren.

Services will be Wednesday, April 6, in both Berne and Portland. Visitation will be from 9 to 10 a.m. that day at Swiss Village, Berne, with a memorial service at 10 a.m. At 2:30 p.m. a memorial service will be conducted at First Presbyterian Church, Portland, with a reception to follow. Pastors Anita Redinger and Scott Solether will officiate at the services.

Memorials may be made to The Portland Foundation, First Presbyterian Church, the Adams County Community Foundation or Swiss Heritage Village.