

Construction Bulletin



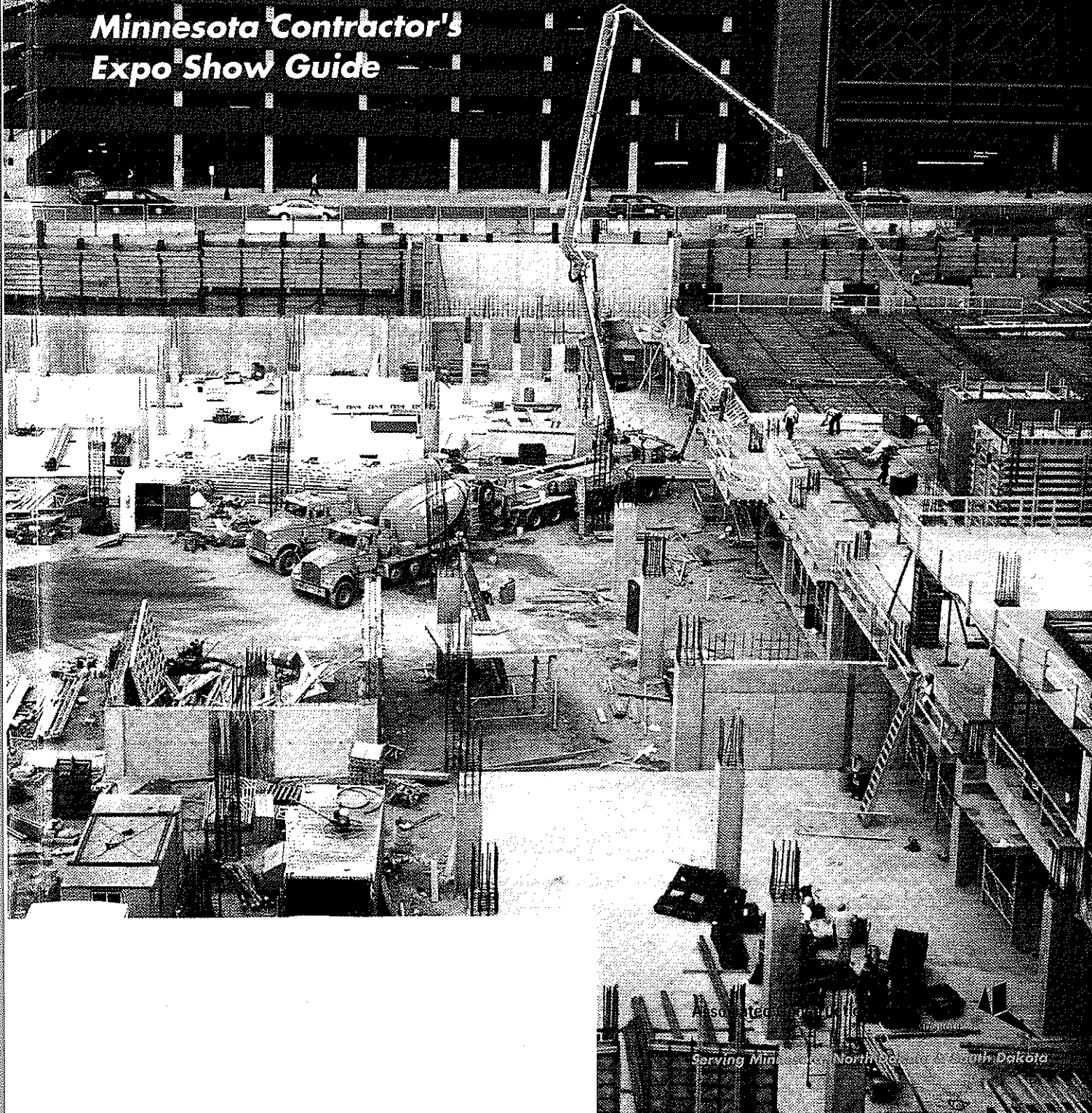
M A G A Z I N E

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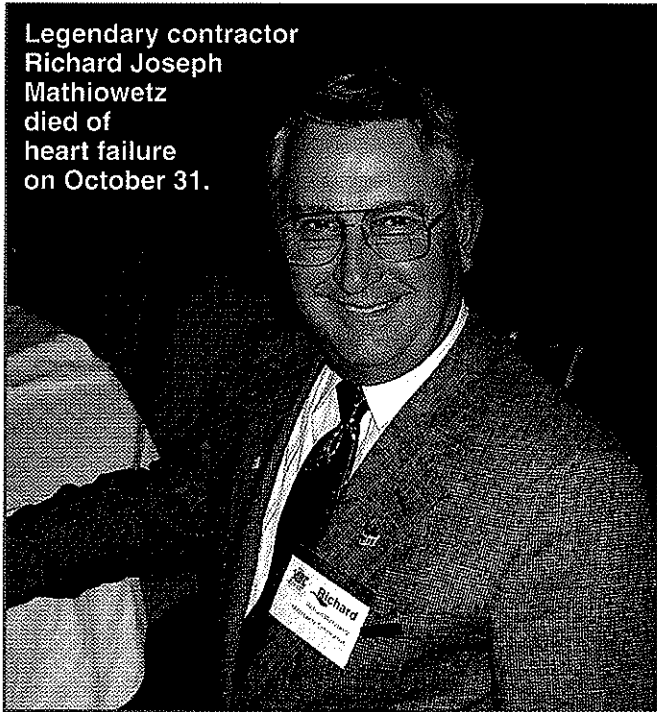
**Inside this issue:
Minnesota Contractor's
Expo Show Guide**



Associated General Contractors of America
Serving Minnesota, North Dakota, and South Dakota



Legendary contractor
Richard Joseph
Mathiowetz
died of
heart failure
on October 31.



Richard J. Mathiowetz, 1935-1999

Almost from the beginning, there always was someone from Sleepy Eye. First there was the college roommate named Wooldrik, then a fishing partner named Rasmussen, and, eventually, there was Richard Joseph Mathiowetz.

Why a small southern Minnesota town (pop. 3,694) so far off my beaten track would produce three extraordinary people in my life is unclear. All three told me scores of fascinating tales of life in Sleepy Eye and the surrounding countryside that echo in my mind as if the stories were experienced by me first-hand.

And now one of the three is gone.

The faxed message from the Associated General Contractors (AGC) of Minnesota might as well have been written in Chinese. I stared at it for a long time trying to decipher its meaning. Oh, the words on the fax were clear enough. Contractor Richard J. Mathiowetz had passed away at the age of 64. What was difficult to understand was the veracity of the statement. Surely this was a mistake. It wasn't possible. Dick Mathiowetz can't die. Not Dick Mathiowetz, head of Mathiowetz Construction Company, 30676 Co. Rd. 24, Sleepy Eye, Minn. Not this good man. Not my friend.

I couldn't put the fax down, as if my staring at it long enough would make the message evaporate.

"He is a legend," son Brian Mathiowetz said at his father's funeral service. No one could have said it better.

Most called him Richard. For some reason, I called him Dick. He didn't seem to mind. Call him anything but late for supper.

The annual meeting of the Minnesota Transportation Alliance followed close on the heels of Dick's passing. It was a strange meeting, made forlorn by his conspicuous absence.

"For the first time in more than two decades," said Fred Corrigan, executive director of the Alliance, "the name of Richard J. Mathiowetz will not appear on the slate of nominees for election to the board of directors.

"Richard was the heart and soul of Mathiowetz Construction for nearly 50 years, and his relentless pursuit of improvements to Minnesota's highway and transportation systems, especially rail-crossing safety, were an inspiration to all who worked alongside him. There would be no more fitting memorial to Richard than to finally pass a significant funding bill during the 2000 Minnesota legislative session. He would not be satisfied with that alone, but he would be pleased."

He was an activist, in the best sense of the word. No contractor in the history of the state ever worked harder to obtain funding for highway projects across the state. He was everywhere, at meetings, legislative sessions, and hearings, working to see that the state's transportation needs were met. He asked questions, he poked, he prodded, and he sought to learn. His thirst for knowledge of the political system led him to be an outspoken critic of certain legislators, highway administrators, and governors.

"He was such a perfectionist," said son Brian, a man who expected excellence in others. "He stepped on more than a few toes," Brian said, "but the toes eventually healed. He wanted people to do things right the first time. He inspired us all."

As if he realized his time on earth would be short, he traveled extensively. He and his wife Mary Lou visited more than 40 countries, and he studied the transportation systems of each of them. Then, on a mountaintop in Norway, the tour bus broke down, and a passenger stepped forward to get it moving again. That bus passenger's name was Richard Mathiowetz.

At my first Conexpo show (and first trip to Las Vegas), I was wandering around alone in obvious confusion, when I spotted Richard and Mary Lou. They greeted me, and all of a sudden it was as if I was back in Minnesota.

He was always traveling, if not around the world, around the state. He wanted, no he demanded the finest highways possible, and he sought specific answers to why this was not possible. He championed the cause of

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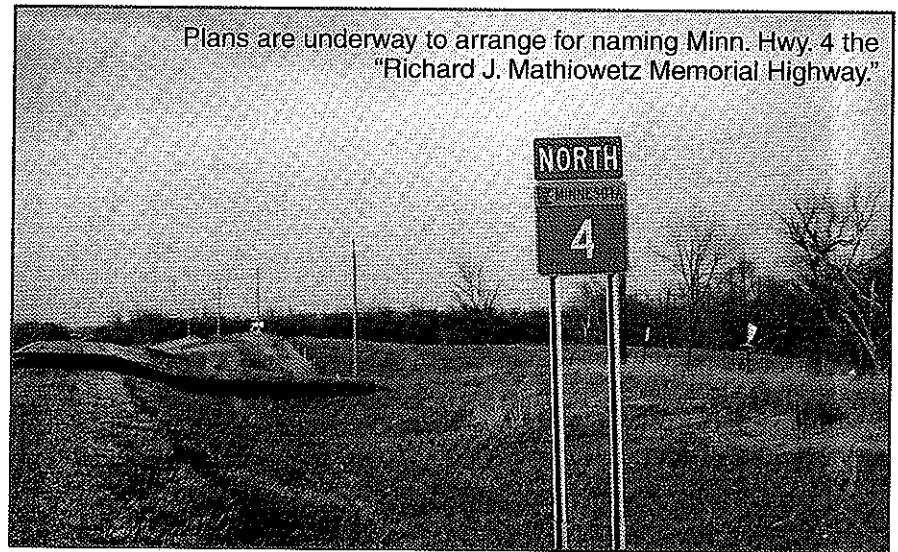


rural Minnesota for he knew that its survival was crucial to the prosperity of the Twin Cities metropolitan area. He was never at a loss for words, and if he allowed you to speak at all, his response to your remarks would most often be the words "why" or "why not?"

His travels weren't always done to promote transportation. The couple went to the countless funerals, some for people they barely knew, because they understood there were living people there who needed to be comforted.

"Mom and Dad went to every funeral or special event they thought they should go to," said daughter Suzann Hendricks. "They were involved with people and compassionate that way. Up to his last day, Dad was doing service for people." Also on his last day, he and Mary Lou celebrated their 43rd wedding anniversary.

Dick knew every one of his employees and took an active interest in their lives. He was known for



Plans are underway to arrange for naming Minn. Hwy. 4 the "Richard J. Mathiowetz Memorial Highway."

his philanthropy in orchestrating projects which enhanced his community, his church, Sleepy Eye schools, and such worthwhile humanitarian organizations as Rebuild Resources. He was an avid supporter of Ducks Unlimited, Pheasants Forever, and the Minnesota Deerhunters Association.

Once, he took me in his truck to show off most of the hundreds of

acres of land he had restored to natural wildlife habitat by planting thousands of trees. The look in his eyes was priceless. He seemed to radiate pride. Next, he took me to the Sleepy Eye hockey rink which would not exist today without him.

But hockey was not his favorite sport. From the time he could hold a bat, he played baseball. The game presented an endless fascination for

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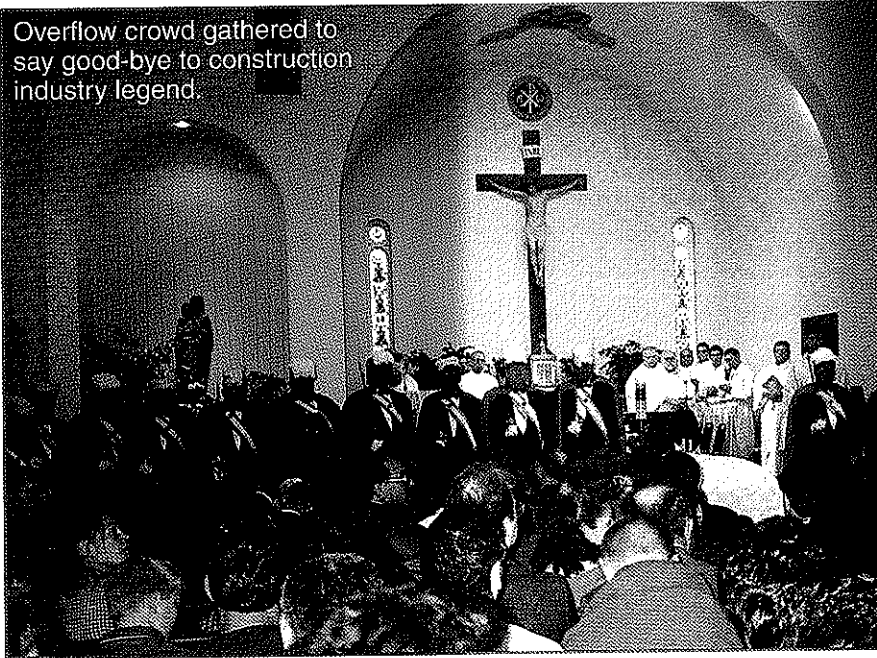
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Overflow crowd gathered to say good-bye to construction industry legend.



him with its intricate maneuvering and strategies that are foreign to most observers. Baseball is a game that suits perfectionists, and baseball was Dick's game. He also valued the redemptive nature of the game. You may strike out your first three times at bat, but you always had that chance for a base hit with your fourth. Active as a player for as long as he could, he eventually constructed a series of baseball and softball fields in direct proximity to the Leavenworth offices of the Mathiowetz Construction Company. They are part of his legacy.

Another fitting legacy would be the dedication of Minn. Hwy. 4 as the "Richard J. Mathiowetz Memorial Highway." First suggested at the Minnesota Transportation Alliance, such a designation would require passage by the legislature.

"If there ever was a Minnesota resident who deserved a state highway named after him it's Richard Mathiowetz," said Doug Weiszhaar, chief engineer and deputy commissioner for the Minnesota Department of Transportation (Mn/DOT).

"Richard spent a lot of his life driving on Hwy. 4," said Corrigan, "so naming the highway after him would be more than fitting."

"My father's legacy will be the family he loved and nurtured and the roads he built," said son Brian.

His sterling reputation led to his being honored by this publication

as the contractor who best exemplified the industry during first 100 years (1893-1993) of *Construction Bulletin* magazine.

At the time, he said, "Our towns and our farmers cannot survive without good roads and bridges. What scares me as a Minnesota contractor is that I'm afraid that even if we do pass a gasoline tax increase, it won't come close to covering the cost of what is really needed."

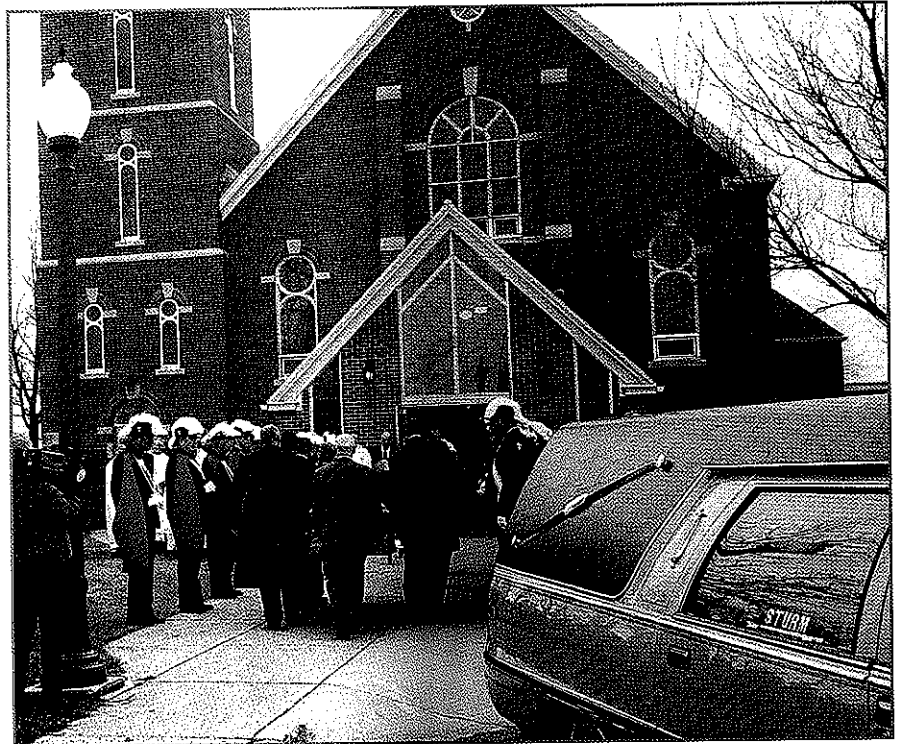
He always spoke his mind. And when he spoke, he spoke for the entire Minnesota construction industry.

His father, Martin, began working for a highway contractor in the early 1920s. Martin soon purchased his own equipment and started what is now the Mathiowetz Construction Company. Family photos show young Richard visiting construction sites when he was only two years old.

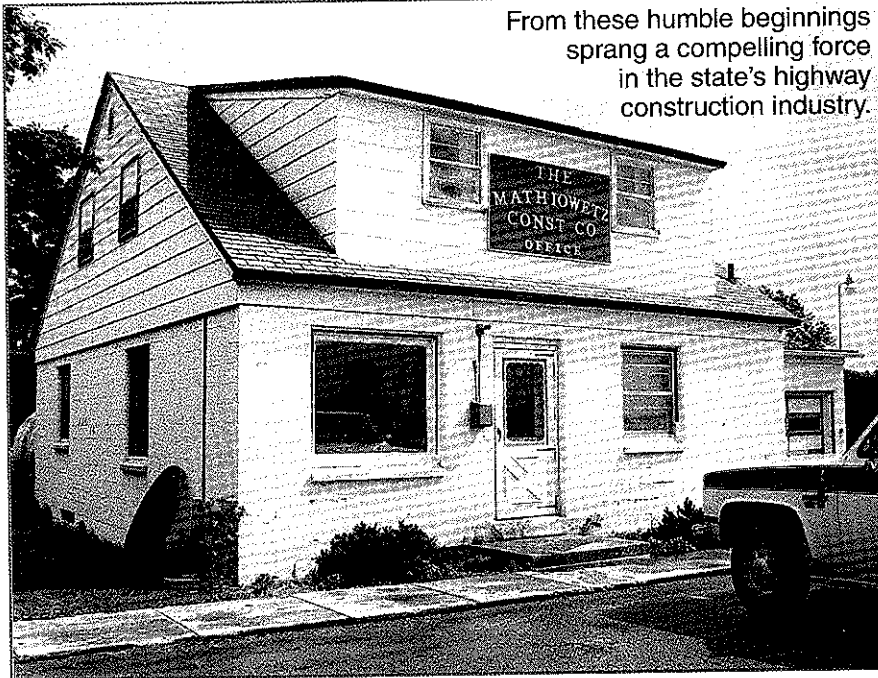
"During the Depression," he recalled, "my father lost everything. He had to start over." Survival of the company was paramount for father and son. "We did it by being careful and conservative. A lifetime of experience helped, too."

Brian Mathiowetz said the word "can't" was not part of his father's vocabulary. "If something needed to be done, he would make it happen."

Richard Mathiowetz was a founding member of the Associated Builders & Contractors (ABC) of Minnesota. "We will all miss Richard," said George Hawkins, Minnesota ABC executive director. "He was a strong advocate for those things in which he believed. Richard was an honest man. He spoke his mind. One



Casket is carried into Church of the Japanese Martyrs. Mathiowetz was a 26-year member of the Knights of Columbus, and his brethren Knights were assembled in his honor.



From these humble beginnings sprang a compelling force in the state's highway construction industry.

can ask little more of anyone than that."

"Richard was our commander," said Mathiowetz Construction Company employee Robert Sharp. "Everything he did was for our betterment."

Sharp recalled that Mathiowetz enjoyed purchasing unusual pieces of equipment, then letting them sit idle for years. "Then, 10 years after he bought it, he would find a use for

it. He had a great memory. He taught us much."

One of his pet projects was a new shop for his company, a project he supervised until his death.

"Our new shop is completed," Brian said. "This marks the 75th year of operation for Mathiowetz Construction. We've proudly served southern Minnesota since 1924 with quality, dependable earth-moving construction services. The new shop was Richard's project and dream."

The shop was dedicated in his memory on November 26.

Those who say one man can't make a difference would be wise to look back at the life of Dick Mathiowetz and recall that, in the words of Paul Bergman of Mn/DOT, "In whatever project he was a part of, he made a difference."

A mass of Christian burial was held at the Church of the Japanese Martyrs directly across the street from the headquarters of the Mathiowetz Construction Company. An overflow crowd packed the church, and uniformed company employees lined the aisles. Father Joe Steinbeisser remarked that Mathiowetz once asked him, "How are we going to get these guys on the road to church?" At the mass, Father Steinbeisser said, "Today, Richard succeeded."

The printed program for the mass contained the following:

*When tomorrow starts without me,
and I'm not there to see,
don't think we're far apart,
for every time you think of me,
I'm right here in your heart.*

The construction industry in Minnesota will never see his likes again. He was a giant.

CB

Olivia ditch project

Before he died, Dick Mathiowetz wanted us to print the following article about one of his company's projects. He was always interested in seeing the accomplishments of his firm and his employees recognized in the pages of our publication.

One such project was the so-called "Olivia ditch job," an open excavation of approximately four miles in length (average depth of the excavation was 23 feet).

Approximately 687,000 cubic yards of material was moved, all by one Mathiowetz Construction Company employee, Dave Domeier.

Domeier became obsessed with the project, working approximately 75 hours per week. Behind the controls of his Komatsu PC100LC crawler excavator, Domeier personally dug the entire ditch in three months time. The job was completed on September 13.

In recognition of his efforts, Domeier was awarded the title of Mathiowetz Construction's "super digger."

Obsessed with completion of project, Mathiowetz Construction's Dave Domeier earned the title "super digger."

