



David Herbert Irish, 83

David Herbert Irish died at home on November 30, 2020, surrounded by family.

He was born on January 2, 1937 in Detroit, Michigan, to Herbert Elwood and Edith Cooper Irish. In 1943, the Irish family - Herb, Edith, Dave and his older sisters Jane and Ann - set out from Mount Clemens on their sailboat the "Loon," traveling through Lake St. Clair, Lake Huron, the Straits of Mackinac, and into Lake Michigan. They sailed into Harbor Springs on a beautiful October day and decided to stay.

As a child, Dave accompanied his father surveying in northern Michigan, often in the woods. It was through Herb's surveying work that the family came to own a cut-over property north of Stutsmanville with a natural spring that was the only source of drinking water for area residents. Dave spent long days with his family replanting "the Springs," and in the decades that followed, working in those woods was Dave's passion: cutting firewood, improving timber stands, pruning trails, and enjoying the woods.

Dave was in his element on the water. Through his mother's work as a camp director and waterfront director at both Wequetonsing and Harbor Point, he had easy access to boats, and made the most of it. His early jobs included teaching sailing and working on and around boats in what was then his family's sideline business.

Although the family lived in Harbor Springs, Dave finished high school in Petoskey in 1954. After graduation he attended Michigan Technological University, then Michigan State University, where he found the sailing team more to his liking than the classroom.

In 1958, Dave fell in love with a young school teacher, Ann Kennedy, who had recently moved north from Ann Arbor. That same year, he entered the US Air Force through the Aviation Cadet program and was commissioned as a navigator. Dave and Ann were married in May of 1959 in her parents' apple orchard, and the couple moved to California, then Massachusetts, returning to live in Harbor Springs when his father fell ill in 1960.

Back home, Dave was widely known in the resort sailing community, and with the help and encouragement of boating friends - who were also accomplished business leaders - he acquired a derelict marine construction site on the Harbor Springs waterfront, where he founded the Irish Boat Shop in 1961. Over 60 years he built the business into a thriving, full service marina in three northern Michigan locations (Harbor Springs, Charlevoix, and Traverse City), employing about 100 year-round workers. When Dave stepped down as Chairman of Board in 2017, his daughter Susan Irish Stewart succeeded him, and the business remains closely held. Sailboat racing took him all over the world. He competed in numerous national and world championship events. He was valued and well-liked for his ability to think strategically, to lead, and to do anything, on any boat, in any weather. He loved Michigan's Mackinac Races and achieved Old Goat status in both Bayview and Chicago yacht clubs, signifying completion of over 25 Mackinac races on each lake.

From his earliest years as a competitor, Dave understood that sailboat racing depends on sailing schools and yacht clubs. A founding member of the Little Traverse Yacht Club, he helped purchase the first clubhouse in 1968. In 2019, he played a similar role helping the Charlevoix Yacht Club construct a new clubhouse on Lake Charlevoix. Both sailing communities benefited from his unflagging support for youth sailing, and Dave personally mentored many young sailors, several of whom became professional sailors. He served the sport's national governing body, US Sailing, for 25 years, then spent 16 years on the Offshore Racing Council which merged into the International Sailing Federation (ISAF), where he served for many years as a Vice President and Executive Committee member.

Service to community characterized his life ashore, too. Dave was involved in local politics in Harbor Springs, beginning with service on the Planning Commission, later city council, and finally 6 years as Mayor. An early environmental activist, Dave was a founding member of the Little Traverse Conservancy. He was also a founding member of Northern Michigan Planned Parenthood and served on the boards of many civic organizations.

Dave was an avid outdoorsman and competitive athlete. He was a ski instructor at Boyne Highlands then Nub's Nob in the 1960s and prided himself on owning skis of every description. Throughout his life he enjoyed ski league at Nub's Nob, Nordic ski racing, heli-skiing, and backcountry skiing. He had many backcountry adventures around the Midwest and Ontario, and in the mountains of the western US, western Canada, Switzerland, and Austria. When not skiing or sailing, he was a cyclist, runner, and late-in-life triathlete.

Dave is survived by his wife Ann; sister Ann Wilderom; daughters Tracy (John) Texter, Susan (Gary) Stewart, Perry (Rich) Hodgson, and his son Colin (Carrie Maxson) Irish; 11 grandchildren, 4 great-grandchildren, and numerous nieces and nephews.

Those who wish to honor Dave Irish's memory may do so by donating to the Little Traverse Conservancy, the Petoskey-Harbor Springs Area Community Foundation, or the charity of their choice.