

JOHN A. DOWDLE, 81

'A humble leader admired by all'

By Barbara Sherlock

Tribune staff reporter

One after another, family, friends and former colleagues described John A. Dowdle as a man with a peaceful spirit, sweet-tempered nature and sound advice.

"My father spent a lifetime quietly going about spreading goodness ... People gravitated to his quiet demeanor and his nonjudgmental way," his son, Kevin, said. "He was a gentle man of few words who always knew exactly what to say."

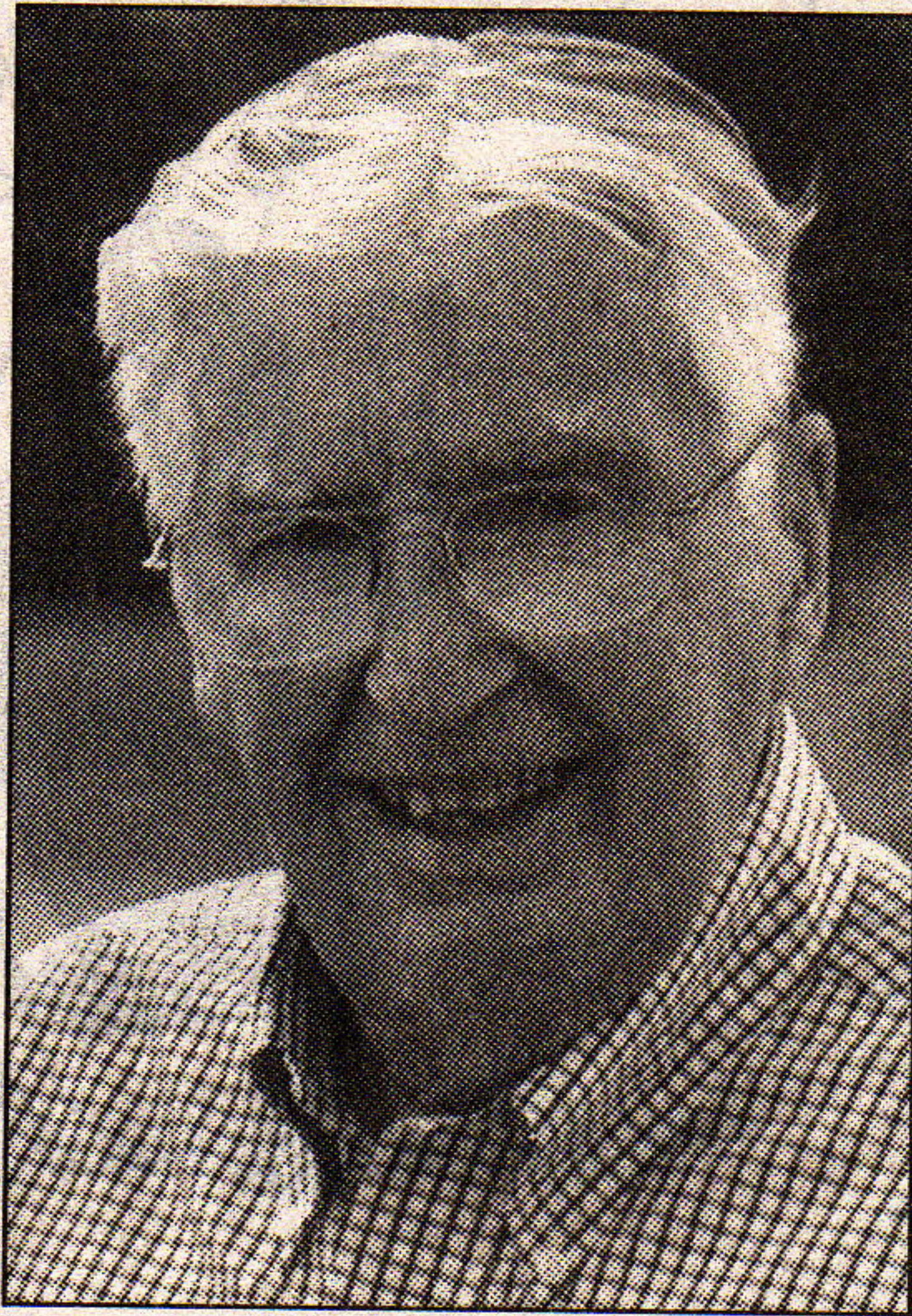
Decades ago, Mr. Dowdle befriended the John Croghan family when they moved into the Catholic parish where he lived.

"He was a humble leader admired by all," John Croghan said. "You could not walk a street in downtown Chicago without people greeting him on every block. He had such great judgment and kindness."

Mr. Dowdle, 81, of Wilmette, a retired financial adviser for Merrill Lynch, died of a stroke Thursday, April 22, at the Palliative Care Center & Hospice of the North Shore.

He graduated from Loyola Academy in 1941. Three decades later, he was the first layman to head the board of trustees of the then 62-year-old school. He was active on its board for another 10 years. Each of his seven sons also graduated from the academy.

Mr. Dowdle attended classes for a short while at Loyola University before volunteering for military service, six days after D-Day in 1944. He served overseas in France, Germany and Iceland in the Army Corps of Engineers.

**John A. Dowdle**

Discharged in 1946, he married Julia McGuire, his high school sweetheart, the following year and began working in the coal business, serving as a sales agent for Republic Coal & Coke Corp., in Chicago. In 1957, he became manager of industrial sales for United Electric Coal Cos., also in Chicago.

He stepped away from the coal business in the early 1960s to become president of Romona Stone, a quarry in Downstate Goreville. Rocks from his quarry were used to build the federal prison in nearby Marion, according to his family.

About the same time, he founded a board to help pay for the fledgling adult education center run by nuns in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood. He also helped form an interfaith housing group in Chicago.

He also served on the board of Catholic Charities and its Madonna Center, a residential home for pregnant teens.

In 1968, he sold the quarry

and became a financial adviser in the private client area of E.F. Hutton, which later became part of Merrill Lynch. He retired in 1998.

"John was first and foremost a mentor to many in our business," said John Betterman, a vice president in the private client area of Merrill Lynch. "He was the optimal role model. He always put the clients first. With his tenure and experience in the business and the way he conducted himself, a lot of advisers were attracted to him for his counsel."

Mr. Dowdle also helped clients with fewer assets.

"John took care of everybody," Betterman said. "He made a big difference for his clients. He was just a great guy."

His grandfather, John Dowdle, was a pioneer contractor in the city. His great-uncle, Patrick A. Nash, was a Democratic leader in the 1930s.

Mr. Dowdle had a passion for golfing, one he shared with his wife. They played golf every Sunday, their special day away from work and their children.

Along with his wife and son Kevin, Mr. Dowdle is survived by six other sons, John, Stephen, Carey, Rick, Denis and Michael; four daughters, Julie Rogers, Mary Potts-Levine, Kathy Mahowald and Sheila Steger; his brothers, J. Jerome and James, a retired Tribune Co. executive vice president; and 33 grandchildren.

Visitation will be held from 2 to 9 p.m. Sunday at the Donnellan Family Funeral Home, 10045 Skokie Blvd., Skokie.

Mass will be said 10 a.m. Monday at SS. Faith, Hope & Charity Church, 191 Linden St., Winnetka.