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'A legend who passed too quickly'

By LYNNETTE HINTZE
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He was a tireless and generous teacher and mentor who embraced life and all of its challenges, his current and former law partners said.

"Frank was a great empowerer. He made you believe you could accomplish things," recalled Kalispell attorney James D. Moore, who joined Morrison and Gene Hedman's law firm in the early 1970s.

Moore worked in a partnership with Morrison for a second time in 1995-96.

"He was an extremely bright, focused attorney," Moore said. "He had the ability to discern the ultimate real issues, and he wasn't afraid to take on major battles."

Morrison took special interest in mentoring younger attorneys, Moore said, and always was supportive of his partners' ventures, both "in the practice and outside the practice."

Sean Frampton, Morrison's partner for the past three years, was a beneficiary of Morrison's legal expertise and generosity. Frampton asked Morrison for assistance with a difficult case in mid-2001. Morrison was retired at the time, but he helped Frampton try the case in spring 2002 and by November that year had established a partnership with Frampton.

Frampton's wife, Diana, also a partner in the Morrison-Frampton firm, said Morrison liked to "brag that he



Robin Loznak file photo/Daily Inter Lake
Frank Morrison Jr., pictured here in 2003 explaining his legal case on behalf of Montana Power Co. shareholders, died Sunday in Seattle. Morrison, 68, served on the Montana Supreme Court before returning to private law practice in Whitefish.

came out of retirement when he found Sean."

Frampton drew from Morrison's lifetime of legal knowledge during long road trips traveling to take depositions, he said.

"We talked for hours and hours about Montana law," he said. "His death is a huge loss. We weren't only law partners, we were great friends. He was very involved in our lives, and our families were very, very close."

Frampton said Morrison would begin each day by visiting with him about politics or the events of the day.

"Every single day he'd walk in and sit down on the couch and we'd talk for a few minutes, often up to a half hour, about politics and so much more," he recalled.

FORMER LAW partner Gene Hedman of Whitefish said he, too, grew close to Morrison during nearly a decade of practicing law together. Most recently, he had worked with Morrison on the board of directors for the Whitefish Lake Institute, a group formed to preserve water quality in Whitefish Lake.

"He always wanted to be a mentor and a teacher. He felt a lot of obligation that way," Hedman said.

Hedman and Morrison shared a love of golf and fishing, and their participation in the 1974 furniture race on Big Mountain proved there wasn't anything they wouldn't try. Hedman laughed as he remembered the wild ride down the mountain at nearly 60 miles per hour in a casket fashioned into a sled.

After the brake caught on one of the sled rails, a third sledder bailed out and Morrison, who was steering the craft, veered into a snow fence, narrowly missing the large crowd of onlookers.

Morrison suffered three cracked ribs in the crash and a spectator was injured, but the race made history.

"We set a record and put the furniture race out of business for a number of years," Hedman said. "Frank kept the trophy and had it in his office at the Supreme Court."

Morrison approached life with an enviable amount of energy, Moore said.

"Everybody lost a big resource when he died," Moore added. "He was huge in my life. He taught me philosophical things, how if you take care of people" the business will take care of itself.

KALISPELL ATTORNEY Dale McGarvey, another of Morrison's early law partners, said he learned much from Morrison's "vast amount of experience."

"I learned tactical things from Frank," McGarvey said. "He was knowledgeable and quick to get to the essence of things. He was an outstanding lawyer."

McGarvey fondly recalled cases he and Morrison worked on, such as a 1970 class-action lawsuit against Atlantic Richfield Co., then the operator of the Columbia Falls aluminum plant. Within a month, the lawyers got a commitment from the plant owner to substantially reduce fluoride emissions. The class-action suit involved a 24-square-mile area around the plant, which "got the attention of the aluminum plant in a hurry," McGarvey recalled.

Another time, Morrison and McGarvey tried a personal-injury case that won the highest verdict in product liability in Montana at the time.

McGarvey's son Allan clerked for Morrison at the Montana Supreme Court and gained experience that was helpful when he became a partner in the McGarvey firm.

McGarvey was involved with Morrison and Morrison's father in the development of Northwoods, a 400-acre tract they subdivided north of Whitefish.

"Frank was very knowledgeable in Whitefish real estate. He knew it like the back of his hand," McGarvey said.

Frampton called his partner "a legend who passed too quickly." McGarvey agreed.

"Frank was one of a kind," McGarvey said. "This is an irreparable loss."

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