



Leo Francis Welch

December 10, 1922 - October 12, 2007

Leo Francis Welch passed away at St. Francis Hospital in Wichita, Kansas, on Friday, October 11, 2007. He was 84 years of age and a long-time resident and businessman of Moline, Kansas. Leo was born at the Welch homestead in rural Elk County on December 10, 1922, to Grace Mina Fleming and Paul Joseph Welch. He attended rural schools and graduated from Elk Falls High School in 1941.

Raised in an Irish Catholic home with eleven brothers and sisters, he grew up with church, family, and friends as his primary focus. These priorities in life would never change. When he met Mary Viola Thomas in the fall of 1945, he was certain she was the woman with whom he would spend his life. Thus began a love story that would surpass any Hollywood production. They were married on April 18, 1948, at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Moline. Soon after marrying, they moved to Lyons, and then to Hutchinson, Kansas, where Leo first worked in the oil fields and later drove a truck for Crupper Transport.

With the desire to enter business for himself, Leo moved back to Moline and purchased his father's trucking business. It was not long before he realized the town's need for someone skilled in auto repair. Typical of Leo, he drove to Kansas City, attending classes at the GM Training Center where he excelled, while still operating the APCO service station owned by O&B Oil Company. Once he received his certification, Leo decided to build and operate

his own shop. In 1961, he finished the building himself and opened Welch's 66 Service, which he continued to operate for more than 50 years.

Not only a lifelong learner but also a consummate teacher, Leo continued to supplement his own knowledge while also thoroughly enjoying the opportunity to share his expertise. Anyone who had a problem, mechanical or otherwise, knew he could receive help from Leo Welch. However, Leo's true passion was teaching young people. He taught the 4-H Small Engine Repair classes for many years. He would work with anyone who was curious and while some learned more than others about mechanical repairs, all learned great lessons about life.

An avid athlete, Leo loved playing baseball and basketball for area teams and did so for several years after graduation. Everyone who knew him knew what great delight he took in watching his children participate in sports, too. Another simple pleasure he thoroughly enjoyed was hunting. The first day of quail season was always a joy for him.

Leo was a lifelong member of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Moline and he was dedicated to the upkeep of Mount Olivet Cemetery. He is survived by his wife of almost 60 years, Mary Viola, of Moline; his oldest son, Thomas, and his wife, Tina, of Harper; his son, James, and his wife, Claudia, of Topeka; his only daughter, Grace, of Branson, Missouri; his son, John, of Wichita; and his youngest son, David, also of Wichita. He is preceded in death by his son, Richard Lynn, his parents, four sisters, and three brothers.

Mass of Christian Burial will be held at 10 AM Tuesday, October 16, 2007 at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Moline. Rosary will be recited at 9:30 AM Tuesday at the church. Interment will be at Mt. Olivet Cemetery. A memorial has been established with the St. Mary's Mount Olivet Cemetery fund and

the American Autoimmune Disease Association and may be sent to Countryside Funeral Home, PO Box 247, Fredonia, Kansas 66736. Arrangements are under the direction of Zimmerman Funeral Home, Howard, Kansas. Online condolences may be left at www.countrysidefh.com.