

## WERNER A. RECHSTEINER

On Monday June 18, 2007 a huge crowd gathered at the Liebfrauen church in Zürich to say 'Adieu' to Werner A. Rechsteiner who had passed away unexpectedly eight days earlier at the age of 64. It was a beautiful, moving ceremony for a man who had touched so many lives, a tribute to an exceptional personality, a highly regarded professional and a true friend. Our deepest sympathy and our thoughts are with his family.

Werner's AFS journey began in 1960 when he embarked on the 'Seven Seas' headed for North America to spend a year in Wilmington, Delaware. It became the journey of a lifetime as Werner kept in touch with his host family and remained closely involved with AFS all these years.

From 1974 to this day Werner Rechsteiner was AFS Switzerland's legal counsel – and so much more. When our paths first crossed in the '80s Werner's reputation had already been established and I was curious to meet him in person. His engaging personality, his kindness, his charm and his professional competence impressed me.

We often worked together during my years as chair of AFS Switzerland. He was always ready to help, to encourage and support us whenever needed. Werner was a pillar of strength and wisdom, an indispensable and unfailing friend. I learned a lot from him during this time.

Werner put into practice the old AFS motto "Walk together, talk together": he always encouraged discussing the issues with the parties involved before resorting to other means. Often problems got solved this way, or at the very least they were defused. Over all these years he was a valued counsel and great help to the managing directors of AFS Switzerland.

On March 23, 1991 the General Assembly named Werner Rechsteiner Honorary Member of AFS Switzerland as a small token of appreciation for his longstanding, untiring and generous involvement and service to the organization.

About this time Werner also started representing AFS International in legal matters, while he continued as AFS Switzerland's legal counsel. This double role was unique in the AFS world and only possible because of Werner's personality and his objectivity, his professionalism and his sound legal competence which commanded everyone's respect. Both parties were convinced of his fairness and that he would always stand for the cause of AFS and on the side of justice without being partisan!

Werner was a true AFSer. In the '90s three of his children experienced an exchange year abroad and the Rechsteiner family hosted young people from Finland, Australia and Canada on the year program. Here we would also like to thank his wife Elisabeth for her untiring support and great patience – without her none of this would have been possible.

More recently Werner Rechsteiner was involved with the AFS Foundation which he helped establish in 2004 and served as one of the two Swiss trustees. On the Foundation Board we all greatly appreciated working together with him and enjoyed the time spent together.

Werner was a remarkable, kind and tactful person of great humanity and of generous and committed character, an attentive and interested listener, a wise and competent counsellor, with a positive and gregarious nature, and just a great friend.

His inspiring personality marked AFS und we all, at AFS Switzerland, AFS International and the AFS Foundation, owe him a lot. We are grateful for the times shared.

MERCI!

July 2007/MM

Article for *InsideOut*, AFS Switzerland