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CONSTRUCTION OF THE QUENTIN N. BURDICK UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE

RALPH E. HANSON*

“Ralph, always be careful of what you wish for because you just might get it!” With these words, Judge Webb announced to me that Congress had approved funding of twenty-three million dollars for the construction of a new Courthouse Annex in Fargo.

Prior to authorizing the funds, Congress had required that a study be done to determine our needs for additional space. When the study was completed, there was a meeting with representatives of the General Services Administration (GSA), the government landlord responsible for construction and maintenance of federal buildings. At this meeting, we were advised that while the study showed a critical need for additional workspace, we would be placed on a register of buildings to be constructed and could not expect construction to begin before the year 2069. Following a deafening period of silence, Judge Webb inquired, “How can we be advanced on that schedule?” The GSA representative smiled and said with a little sarcasm, “Well, you’ll just have to get yourselves a Senator.” Apparently he did not know that Senator Quentin N. Burdick was chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. Shortly after the meeting, Judge Webb met with Senator Burdick at the Senator’s home, and based on Judge Webb’s assurances of need, the Senator agreed to obtain funding.

Designing and planning started in 1994, and the building was dedicated in 1998. During the four-year period, Judge Webb exhibited the fine character traits of leadership, tenacity, and vision. With federal judges, federal clerks, bankruptcy judges and clerks, United States magistrates, United States marshals, the United States Probation Office, and United States attorneys all interested in the construction of the courthouse, it was a real test of his leadership skills keeping this group working together for the common good. His tenacity was tested when, during the design stage and early construction, GSA decided to declare a moratorium on construction of all federal building during what was called a “Time out and Review” period. Judge Webb traveled to Washington and met with the head of GSA,

* Ralph E. Hanson retired in 1995 following an almost thirty-year career as Deputy in Charge of the Federal Court Clerks Office in Fargo. He was the project coordinator for the construction of the Quentin N. Burdick United States Courthouse.

and following a very frank meeting, the moratorium was lifted for the Fargo project.

It was Judge Webb's vision that demanded that this building be constructed to achieve a hundred-year life span, and he would not accept shoddy materials or designs that deviated from that vision. He sought to insure that the building was designed to accept future advances in technology, and he secured funding to construct an interactive television in the courtrooms and a separate teleconferencing room for meetings and seminars. The building is truly modern and functional in every way. The final example of Judge Webb's excellent leadership in the building process was that the courthouse was constructed on time and within budget.

Times of trial sometimes bring out the best in people and that was true with Judge Webb. People rise to a level that one could only imagine before an event. Truly, the construction of the Fargo courthouse brought out the very best of Judge Webb's character, and without his leadership, the building would not have achieved the prominence it enjoys today.