WILLARD CHASE OBITUARY:

Willard Chase, founder of the Northern Kittitas County Tribune, with a 70-year career in Community Weekly newspapers, and a community leader

A 1999 edition of Ellensburg (Wash.) Record reported "Willard Chase Committed His Life to Services". He was one of the one hundred persons recognized "who went the extra mile" for the benefit of Kittitas County (Wash.) during 100th anniversary of the county in 1989. A 1967 issue of Puget Sound Power's "The Lively Land" featured him as "Cle Elum's Number One Booster".

He was born June 8, 1913 at the farm home of his parents, Lono Irwin and Anna (White) Chase in rural Garrison, North Dakota. He graduated in 1931 from Garrison High School where he started a life long newspaper career reporting on sporting events to the local weekly and was recognized as a representative of the Associated Press. Contributing to that career was going back to school one year to attend the typewriter class.

Early in his newspaper career he was recognized by the Western Newspaper Union, Fargo, N. D., Sept. 16, 1938, as: "a man who writes his own editorials, can get along with 400 farmer owners and who can sell and print the amount of advertising he carries -- he is a good newspaper man."

During the time that he lived in North Dakota, Willard was involved in the political system. Around the time of his birth, a new party was approved by the voters in a state wide election -- The Nonpartisan League. It was the farmers, dissatisfied with what they were receiving for their products, who banded together to replace the Republican party with the Nonpartisan League, with community owned newspapers in all of the counties, the only state owned bank in the U.S. and many other agencies. Willard was editor of the newspapers at Garrison, Williston, Parkland, Bottineau and the governor's Nonpartisan League at Bismarck, in North Dakota, and at Cle Elum, Renton, Puyallup, Port Orchard, Summer, Tacoma in Washington. Willard organized a Young Nonpartisan League's providing an opportunity for young people.

After his marriage to Dolores Halpau of Douglas, N. Dak., June 12, 1937 they moved to Washington State in 1940 and in November 1953 to Cle Elum where they founded the NKC Tribune at the invitation and support of local business men and city officials.

They had five daughters, Rosalie, Clarice, Iris, Valerie and Laurel and two sons.
In 1962 he purchased the opposition Miner Echo and consolidated it with the Tribune. Echo publisher P. D. Peterson said, "We leave it to Willard Chase to carry on as the publisher in excellence characteristic of him". After selling the Tribune in 1972 he continued as city council reporter 20 years and publisher of Kiwanis and Eagles newsletters.

The Northern Kittitas County was at an economic crossroad when he came to Cle Elum during the declining coal mining and sawmills industries. He served as secretary of the Kittitas Valley Development Association and as a member of the Bonneville Power Administration Advisory Commission in an unsuccessful effort to find new coal markets because of the advent of nuclear power at Hanford and cheaper surface coal mining at Chehalis. The loss was offset when Shoemaker Mfg., Seattle, accepted an invitation from KVDA and Chase to relocate in Kittitas County in the former Coal miners Company Store at Roslyn. Later, as a member of the Kittitas Co. Port Commission, he was involved in keeping the growing company in the Upper County with the development of an industrial park on the former site of the Miller Lumber Co. in Cle Elum.

During the search for alternative payrolls he brought the University of Washington's Community Development Program to Cle Elum and Roslyn to provide support. "Spavm, of Coal Dust: history of Roslyn, 1886-1955, was one of the accomplishments. He also organized and served as chairman of the Upper County Economic Survey and recreation Committee, including testifying before a Congressional Committee, in support of the Chamber of Commerce's concerns about a proposal to set aside 500,000 acres of the Alpine Lakes for no roads access to land ideal for family type commercial and recreation facilities. He also testified before a Washington state legislative committee on the need for doctors and medical services in Cle Elum. He advocated a Chamber of Commerce, which he organized in 1960, and served as the first and 26th presidents and at times as a member of the board of directors. In 1958 he worked with representatives of the Fraternal Order of Eagles to organize a Washington State Youth Convention, the first of which was held in Cle Elum with Chase as chairman. The Eagle Valley camping area is a beneficial by-product of the convention.

Six months after selling the Tribune the coal miners owned hospital and clinic was closed and Chase was hired as administrator to get new doctors and reopen facilities, which he was successful in doing in mid-1973, after which he was instrumental in getting the donated to a recently voter approved hospital district. He then served as first administrator of the district.
In 1970 he was appointed director of Civil Defense which he reorganized as Kittitas County Emergency Management (serving as the director until 1990, 12 yrs) which provided responses to all man and natural caused disasters, to replace Civil Defense which was prepared for only nuclear disasters. He organized and served as secretary or chairman of the Emergency Medical Services Council, the Search and Rescue Council, the Mutual Aid Group for fire fighters and a Hazardous Materials Planning Committee. He also was secretary of the Forest Service's Fire Prevention Coop.

He was an over 70 years member of Cle Elum Kiwanis (life time status) and Cle Elum Eagles. Served both as secretary, 23 years Kiwanis (22 years "outstanding"), 10 years (and also as president of both) and was Eagles; lieutenant governor (distinguished) of Kiwanis 1964-85.

He was in several community/charitable programs including chairman of the Upper County March of Dimes, United Way and Labor Days/Loggers Festival and serving on school district and hospital district levy committees and treasurer of the Christmas Baskets program. He was a member of Communications Workers of America, AARP, Senior Center; St. John's Catholic Church, serving as lector and as the public relations director and secretary of the Yakima Diocese and its men's society; and member of Typographical Union; Red Cross (30 years); Planning commission; ration boards.

He was honorary member Cle Elum Fire Department, marshall of 1990 Pioneer Days parade, recipient of award for "continuing dedicated/unselfish service to community of Cle Elum" and recipient of Chamber of Commerce's Distinguished Award 1986, "This is Your Life" Roast in 1980 and "Volunteer of The Year" award in 1999. In 2000 he received an "Every Day Hero" Award, for his community services, and a lifetime membership, in recognition of his 40 years of perfect attendance, from the Cle Elum Kiwanis Club.

Cle Elum mayor Gary Berndt issued a proclamation declaring June 4, 2003 "Willard Chase Day" during a Kiwanis sponsored recognition of his 90th birthday and community services.

He was a sports fan, especially of Cle Elum boys and girls to state basketball championships. He was a member of a bowling team and secretary of a bowling league. During his high school days he was named to the North Dakota all-state football team, was ranked among the top four in that state participating in the 100 and 220 yard races and county champion in high jump and races, and was a member of the basketball team. He was president and salutatorian of his 1931 graduating class of which he
was rated No. 2 in scholastic achievement. As a member of the high school speaking team he was known as an "orator of reknown".

County Commissioner Rich Hoctor said: "Willard has been an integral part of the county operation for over a decade."

Tony Giolitti said, after selling his Cle Elum City Hardware: "The last 10 or 12 years have probably been the most lucrative for me. The 60s were pretty rough times, when Cle Elum lost the coal mines, sawmills shut down, and logging trickled to nothing. I credit Willard Chase and his Tribune editorials with helping save the business community. He encouraged recreation and, today, I would say 75 percent of our business is done during the six months of the year when recreationists come over from the Coast to their summer homes in the hills."

He was preceded in death by his parents, Lono and Anna Chase, brothers, Leland and Robert, and a son, Willard, at birth.

He was survived by

Funeral services and reception

In lieu of flowers, Willard suggested memorial donations, financial or voluntary man hours, to your choice of community services, to which he dedicated his life.