

Jeff Bickel

Jeff A. Bickel, 48, 2155 S. Boundary Pike, Portland, Ind., died May 16, 2003, in an airplane crash in South Carolina.

He was born Aug. 23, 1954, in Portland, to Ron and Mary Ellen Shreeve Bickel. They survive in Portland. His wife, the former Eileen D. Alig, died in the same crash.

Surviving are two sons, Tom of Peoria, Ill., and Brian of Chicago, Ill.; a daughter, Sherry (Schaun) Shepherd, Lafayette, Ind.; two brothers, Dennis of New Haven, Ind., and Ed of Portland; and four grandchildren.

He was plant manager at Moser's Engineering in Portland.

Services are 11 a.m. Thursday at Baird-Freeman Funeral Home, Portland, the Rev. Marty Sandhage officiating. Burial will be at Green Park Cemetery. Calling is 4-9 p.m. Wednesday at the funeral home.

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Jeff and Eileen Bickel: Friends say good-bye to Bickels (5/23/03)

Family and friends filled Baird-Freeman Funeral Home Thursday morning to say good-bye to Jeff and Eileen Bickel.

The Portland couple was killed in a plane crash early Friday evening near Allendale, S.C., en route to Lady's Island in Beaufort, S.C., for vacation. Also killed were Greg and Marianne Moser of rural Portland.

There wasn't an empty seat in the main sanctuary, while others filled an adjoining sitting room. In another room, Jeff's co-workers from Moser Engineering gathered to mourn the loss of their friend and plant manager. Eileen's co-workers from Bearcreek Farms filled two rows in the main chapel.

Floral arrangements -- too many to fit in the sanctuary -- were also placed in the smaller adjacent rooms along with many framed photos of Eileen and Jeff and their family, several small angel statues and prayer stepping stones.

The 10 a.m. service was conducted by the Rev. Marty Sandhage of the Immaculate Conception Church in Portland, who acknowledged the shared loss felt by the community.

"All of us would like to say something that would make this entirely different," he said. "We all want to say the right thing. (Jeff, Eileen, Greg and Marianne) were more than just friends, more than just co-workers and more than just people you ran around town with. They were family." He added, "It's good that we remember today all the good things about four lives that were taken too early."

Sandhage recalled his own memories of the couple and retold stories that had been shared with him.

"Jeff was known for his dedication to his family and his work," he said. "It's inspiring to find people who care about others ... It was that mutual respect. Everybody (at Moser Engineering) loved to see him."

He enjoyed his fishing boat and tinkering in the garage. He also wanted to learn to fly, and Sandhage said, "It's our faith that tells us he has learned how to fly."

Sandhage said Eileen, who was one of his parishioners he saw every week, will always be remembered for her constant grin, willingness to help, and devotion to her family.

"Jeff and Eileen were the kind of people who went out of their way for family and their friends," Sandhage said.

He offered readings from Scripture to ease the grief of those gathered Thursday.

"Our Lord that loves us into life, loves us into life eternal," Sandhage said, and quoting the 23rd Psalm said, "In the Lord's own house I shall dwell for ever and ever."

The Bickels' niece, Mindy Clark of Franklin, who also spoke at the funeral, said tearfully, "We can all get through this by remembering the good times."

She recalled her graduation from college a few weeks ago, which was the last time she saw her aunt -- who snapped several photos before she realized there was no film in the camera -- and her uncle, who still called "Minniemac," the nickname he had given her as a child.

"They will be sadly missed," she said of the couple who had been married for 29 years. "But remember that they are together."

Clark, who is Eileen's goddaughter, also read a poem she had written for them. It ended, "For Jeff and Eileen are in the most awesome place, together forever they will be, just waiting there for you and me."

Contributed by Jane Edson