

Endowment in memory of Kenneth M. Viste, Jr., MD



Kenneth M. Viste, Jr., MD (1941-2005)

To honor and remember Dr. Viste's extraordinary life, the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation has established the Kenneth Viste, Jr., MD, Young Physician Leadership Award for those who exemplify the unique legacy of Dr. Viste: commitment to patients, profession and community. Please consider making a contribution to help support this fund. To donate, mail a check made payable to the Wisconsin Medical Society Foundation.

Mail to: 330 E. Lakeside St., Madison, WI 53715, or contact the Foundation at 608.442.3800. If sending a check, please add a note to indicate that the donation is for the Viste Young Physician Leadership Award.

A lesson for us all

Three Miles by Wheelchair

By Steve Busalacchi

"I remember it as if it was yesterday. September 17, 1955," recalled Kenneth Viste, Jr., MD. "When I tried to get out of bed, I fell flat on my face. I never walked again."

Polio had struck the 13-year-old farm boy from northern Wisconsin. From then on, he would be in and out of hospitals constantly undergoing therapies. After more than a year of this, Ken was bored and desperately needed a break from the monotony, so he hatched a plan to play hooky from his Madison hospital one afternoon to go visit the Governor. Yes, the Governor and no, Ken didn't know him. But the way he saw it, the Governor and he were in the same city, so why not drop by?

The self-described "gangly" teenager got in his wheelchair, rolled out of the hospital and into traffic. He went up hills, over curbs and finally, three miles later, arrived at Governor Kohler's office at the State Capitol.

"Do you have an appointment?" the secretary asked.

Before answering, Ken sat up straight then locked the brakes on his wheelchair, indicating he wasn't going anywhere.

"Well, not really," he replied. "But I am sure he would want to see me if he knew I was here. My name is Ken Viste."

A few minutes later, Governor Kohler came out and shook his hand. Then he invited Ken into his office where they chatted for the next 45 minutes.

What Ken had back then, in addition to a disabling illness, was pure chutzpa. And he had it in spades, long before he ever became a physician. That level of determination helped Ken drive over the obstacles he encountered in his life, becoming a respected neurologist, a state and national leader of medical societies, and interestingly, an advisor to governors of both parties.

"Leaders need drive and determination to make things happen," Dr. Viste once said. "But they also need to know how to listen to others"—a lesson Governor Kohler taught him that he would never forget.



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