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Ronald W. Mitchell, executive director of the International Reading Association in Newark, died Friday of heart failure in White Sulphur Springs, W.Va., where he was on a business trip.

He lived at 718 Colgate Lane, Nottingham Green, Newark. He was 54.



MR. MITCHELL

Mr. Mitchell had headed the non-profit educational organization headquartered in Newark, which is considered to be the leading voice for reading educators worldwide, since 1984. He was a well-known advocate and spokesperson on issues relating to literacy and reading education.

The year after Mr. Mitchell became executive director, the organization funded a grant to examine ways that children could become better readers. The study, submitted to then Education Secretary William Bennett, said better-trained teachers are a key factor in influencing children to read.

In a 1985 interview with The News Journal, Mr. Mitchell emphasized that the reading experience must not be left up to teachers alone, but should begin at home.

"Children who are read to at home when they are young not only gain an appreciation for what reading is, but there's comprehension and interpreting involved; and they develop an interest and a love for reading," he said.

Mr. Mitchell joined IRA as Assistant Executive Secretary in 1966. He was responsible for membership, research, the Annual Convention, and the supervision and development of IRA councils. In 1974, he was named Director of Conferences. In addition to the Annual Convention, which draws 15,000 people each year, Mr. Mitchell was responsible for the biennial World Congress and many IRA regional conferences

held in the United States and Canada.

A native of Minnesota, he received his bachelor's degree in elementary education, and his master's and doctoral degrees in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota. He began his professional career as an elementary teacher in St. Paul, Minn., and then spent five years teaching developmental reading at the University of Minnesota. He also taught elementary school curriculum, educational psychology and statistics at the University of Minnesota and served as a visiting professor at the University of Washington and University of Delaware.

He is listed in Who's Who in America, and was a member of the Steering Committee of the World Conference on Education for All, sponsored by The World Bank, UNESCO, UNICEF, and United Nations Development Program. He was a member of the American Society of Association Executives' key professional associations' committee, and served on the advisory board of the Education Resources Information Center's clearinghouse on reading and communication skills and of the Muscular Dystrophy Association of Delaware.

He served in the Marine Corps from 1954 to 1956.

He is survived by his wife, Marlene; three sons, Thomas of Kansas City, Mo., Stephen and James, both of Newark; a daughter, Margaret Jarrell of Newark; two sisters, Beverly Graaf of St. Paul, Minn. and Lynn Kammueler of Farmington, Minn.; and a granddaughter, Lisa Mitchell.

Services will be 11 a.m. Wednesday at the chapel of Robert T. Jones and Son Funeral Home, Main Street, Newark, where friends may call from 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday. Burial will be in All Saints Cemetery, Kirkwood Highway.

Instead of flowers, the family suggests memorial contributions to The Ronald W. Mitchell Memorial Fund in care of the Interna-