



Ronald K. "Ron" Richey

June 16, 1926 - September 17, 2010

Ronald K. "Ron" Richey was born on June 16, 1926 as a proud native of the town of Erie, the County of Neosho, and the State of Kansas. Besides schooling, his early years were spent working in his father's drug store, the only one in town, as the youngest of five boys and the junior member of the staff. Ron's favorite part of the job was working behind the soda fountain, getting to know the customers and amusing them with his banter. After serving in the Army Air Corps and being trained as a tail gunner on a B-24 during World War II, he went on to graduate from Topeka's Washburn University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1949 and a Law degree in 1951. After graduation, he served as an attorney with the Kansas Insurance Department and later as Legislative Manager for the American Mutual Insurance Alliance of Chicago, Illinois. In 1964, he joined Globe Life and Accident Insurance Company in Oklahoma City as General Counsel until being appointed Chairman and Chief Executive Officer in 1976. He served in that capacity until 1980 when Torchmark Corporation of Birmingham, Alabama, an NYSE-listed company, purchased Globe Life. In April 1982, Ron was elected President of Torchmark and added the title of Chief Executive Officer and Chairman of the Board in later years. The Wall Street Transcript recognized Ron as the "Outstanding Insurance Executive" in the industry for 7 consecutive years from 1985 to 1991, and in 1989 Financial World named Ron "CEO of the Decade" for the life and health insurance industry. He retired as CEO in 1998 and as Chairman in 2002. Ron's strengths as an insurance executive lay in

creating value for shareholders, his knowledge of regulation and taxation, his ability to communicate Torchmark's strategy to Wall Street analysts and investment bankers, and perhaps most importantly, his tireless pursuit of efficiency. As a result, during his tenure as Chairman and CEO, Torchmark was perennially the most profitable company in its field while shareholders saw a nearly 5-fold increase in the value of their Torchmark holdings. Despite any acclaim he might have received, he was always quick to credit to the invaluable knowledge and guidance he received from his mentors, Paul Wise, John Singletary, and Frank Samford, Jr., as well as the counsel he received from colleagues and the energy and ideas of subordinates, old friends, and head caddies. Yet, close friends and confidants knew well that Ron's greatest strength came from his wife of sixty years, Florence, whom he met at a Washburn Ichabods football game while Ron was squiring the Phi Delta Theta fraternity mascot, a Saint Bernard. Florence was able to see past the dog's salivary and shedding and find a funny, loving, and capable man with whom to share her life. In return, Florence's outgoing personality, unwavering belief in Ron, and support on the home front made the many moves of Ron's career path possible. Ron made no secret of the fact that it was Florence's salary as a First Grade public school teacher that put him through law school. Ron served as President of the Association of Oklahoma Life Insurance Companies and as a director of the American Council of Life Insurance and the Health Insurance Association of America. He also served on numerous civic and cultural boards, including the National Cowboy Hall of Fame and Western Heritage Center. In 1993, Mr. Richey received the Distinguished Service Award from Washburn Alumni Association. He was named "Kansan of Distinction—Business" in 1987 by the Topeka Capital Journal. Mr. Richey received the honorary Doctor of Commerce Degree, as a distinguished alumnus from the Washburn University in May 1989. He maintained lifelong close ties with his Washburn friends via "The Free Society of GNIP-GNOP" with whom he and Florence reunited annually and which grants awards to the best articles in the Washburn Law Journal. Additionally, Ron and Florence

endowed a scholarship program at Washburn, as well as donating the funds to renovate his college fraternity, Phi Delta Theta. In 1998, Ron was awarded the Ellis Island Medal of Honor in recognition of significant achievements made by members of our diverse American society. NECO honored Ron for his Scottish-Irish-Swedish-German heritage, as well as his many accomplishments in the fields of commerce and philanthropy. Ron is survived by Florence and his three children, Linda Graves, attorney and former First Lady of the State of Kansas; Robert, a retired insurance executive and founding member of the McHeadley Society, and Christopher, CEO of Neosho Capital. He was very proud of and devoted to all three of his children. Ron was a grandfather of six from whom he derived great joy and taught many a lesson in gin rummy and dominoes: Olivia, Anabel, Ethan, Katie, Andrew, and Allyson. His love of family extended beyond his immediate one, and his affection for his nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws helped keep whole the bonds of the extended Richey family. Ron was an avid and devoted lifelong golfer, though his pursuit of a scratch handicap forever eluded him. His short iron and putting games made him an opponent never to underestimate, while his good cheer, humor, and easy laugh made him a much sought-after playing partner. His love of dogs, starting as a toddler with Peggy, a Boston Terrier of fearsome rapping ability, on through his Golden Retriever, Angus (with whom he shared his Torchmark Chairman's portrait), meant his households were never without two or three faithful canine companions with whom to share treats and one-sided conversations. Kansas, and particularly Erie, his hometown, remained a touchstone for Ron. He initiated and funded an ongoing scholarship program for Erie high school students who were both hardworking and interested in garnering a college degree. To date, over eighty-four students have received scholarship funds. Ron also donated the funds to purchase the land for the just-completed Erie High School. Besides his devotion and generosity to the University of Kansas Jayhawk basketball team, perhaps the most visible proof of his love for his native state is the 22-

foot tall bronze statue of the Kansa Indian warrior, Ad Astra (“To the Stars”), that sits atop the Kansas State Capitol Dome in honor of the first natives of Kansas. First proposed in 1889, a contest to choose the statue was finally held in 1985, but funding was inadequate to place Ad Astra on the Dome's cupola until 2002 when Ron provided the lead donation to bring the century-old project to fruition, the fact of which he did not want revealed during his lifetime. Formal dedication took place November 4, 2002, with Ron's son-in-law, Governor Bill Graves, officiating and members of the Kansa Nation attending. It is fitting that Ad Astra aims his arrow both high and true, for Ron did so as well. Ron passed away peacefully in Colorado Springs, Colorado on August 25, 2010 surrounded by members of his family. He will be forever missed by his wife, family, friends, and colleagues for his love, intellect, generosity, humility, drive, loyalty, and renowned sense of humor. A memorial mass was held for Ron on August 28, 2010 at the Sacred Heart Chapel at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs. A memorial service will be held 10:30 a.m. Friday, September 17, 2010 at Kevin Brennan Family Funeral Home, 2801 S.W. Urish Road, Topeka, Kansas, 66614 where Pastor Larry Jordan from Erie Federated Church in Erie, Kansas will officiate. Inurnment will follow at Mount Calvary Cemetery in Topeka. Reception will follow. A memorial service in Birmingham will be held at a later date. The family asks that in lieu of flowers a donation be made to Pikes Peak Hospice in Colorado Springs, the Humane Society in Birmingham, Alabama or the Humane Society in Colorado Springs sent in care of the funeral home.

Tribute Wall

RB

“ Rest in Peace, Mr Richey 🙏 and thank you for allowing me to share your family!

RWilliam Bunting,Sr - May 26, 2023 at 03:30 PM



“ Ronald K. "Ron" Richey

January 28, 2023 at 12:08 PM

SR

“ To Florence and family we send our sincere sympathy for your loss. We also send our sincere appreciation for Ron's life and for the wonderful gifts that Ron and Florence bestowed upon our church, school and community. We are proud of our "local boy" who achieved much and shared so many great gifts in his hometown. We thank you for letting us share this thought with you. Sam and Dorothy

Sam & Dorothy Ricketts - September 16, 2010 at 03:59 PM

SC

“ Please accept my sincerest condolences and my indulgence in expressing thoughts of how life certainly seems to bind us together. My parents moved to Erie right after my dad (Talmage Engles) graduated from K State around 1950 and became the Neosho county 4-H club leader. I started first grade in 1952 I was lucky to count Mary as a friend and acquaintance though she was a grade ahead of me so we weren't close friends in the scheme and order of grade schoolers. I have spent the past few days pouring over the 1953, 1954, 1956 Mem-Erie yearbooks that I have carried around all these many years.

At one time my family lived in a little house right behind the Richey home and Jimmie and Danny Arnold and I spent many a spooky evening prowling around over the rock fence by the fish pond.

And a lot of time was spent going to the drug store whenever the folks thought they could afford a nickle, sometimes, 10 cents, for me to squelch my craving for comic books.

I didn't know the adults in the Richey family well while we lived in Erie but looking back Ron could have been the one I gave my nickle or dime to and I know mom traded at the store.

But I did get to know Ron a bit in 1979 until he left the Globe Life offices here in Oklahoma City. I have an interior plant business and we furnished and maintained plants in his and other offices. One day I was watering plants in his office and noticed a book regarding Erie/Neosho CO/Kansas on the coffee table. I couldn't believe my eyes and asked him of his connection. Up until that time the idea that he could be of the same Erie-Richey family I had known hadn't crossed my mind. Being the friendly, courteous person that he was, Ron graciously and good naturedly endured my questions about your family, especially those about Mary and how she was doing and where she was living and all those things that comes to mind.

In reading Ron's obituary I am so impressed that he was such a continuingly generous benefactor to Erie and generations of students.

Though I have lived all over Kansas as a teen and adult and now live in Oklahoma, Erie and the people there were a major influence in my life.

As a matter of fact, I noted that the first message of condolence listed here is from Gregg and Becky (Weir) Hunn. Dr Weir deliver both my sister, Sarita (1951), and brother Timothy (1954) at the Parsons hospital.

No words can soften the feelings of personal loss your family has right now. I hope that my thoughts and prayers are in some small measure helpful in celebrating the life of an extraordinary man and what he has meant to so many over the years.

Sandy Engles Casteel

Sandy Engles Casteel - September 14, 2010 at 01:51 PM

“ I would like to offer a note of condolence to the all the family and friends of Ronald K.Richey. Even though I am sure the sorrow of this great man’s passing is monumental, please know that his legacy lives on in the hearts and minds of our family and community. I mean only respect when I use two words to describe my thoughts of Ronald K.Richey: The first being Success, my favorite poem by Ralf Waldo Emerson sums this up perfectly;

Success

*To laugh often and much;
to win the respect of intelligent people
and the affection of children;
to earn the appreciation of honest critics
and endure the betrayal of false friends;
to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others;
to leave the world a bit better,
whether by a healthy child,
a garden patch
or a redeemed social condition;
to know even one life has breathed easier
because you have lived.
This is to have succeeded.*

And the second being Philanthropy: “the effort or inclination to increase the well-being of mankind.”

It is amazing how one man could touch the lives of so many. Mr. Ronald Richey has elevated our lives by his example and generosity. Our son Eric is one of the eighty four Erie High School students to benefit from Mr. Richey’s scholarships. It has helped him move toward his goal of becoming a physician. Our community and Erie High School students will feel the grace of his generosity every time we look at the new high school. It will not be hard to imagine him standing behind the soda fountain in the new high school just like he did as a youth, working for his father ... but this time it will be as an example of what we can all become and how we all have the potential to be successful in life.

Greg and Becky (Weir) Hunn

Greg Hunn and Becky (Weir) Hunn - September 09, 2010 at 06:08 PM

BR

“ *I was sorry to learn of Ron's death. Please extend my condolences to Florence and the family. I enjoyed the time I spent on Globe's board working with Ron. As I was only about 26 years old representing the Reece family, I was worried I might not be taken seriously. Ron quickly put me at ease and always treated me with respect. The Reece family was comfortable that someone as capable as Ron was running the company.*

Florence, you may not be aware that my wife, Linda, passed away in June. I had 45 great years with her. I certainly empathize with you on your loss.

Bob Reece

Bob Reece - September 08, 2010 at 03:08 PM