



Vern C. Vanderbilt Jr.

March 29, 1920 - April 10, 2017

If you were a P51 Mustang pilot in World War II, a car owner in the 1970s, or a plop-plop, fizz-fizzer of Alka-Seltzer in the 1980s, there is a good chance Vern C. Vanderbilt Jr., affected your life. Mr. Vanderbilt, who died Monday, April 10 at The Springs in Richmond of complications following neck surgery, devoted his life to technology development and invention as an aeronautical, mechanical and electrical engineer. Vern cherished living independently at his Springhill home near Hagerstown until his final few days. He was 97 years old.

What a joyous and full life!! As a precocious child he rumbled over the streets of Indianapolis in a self-built motorized cart powered by a cast-off gas washing machine engine. As a teenager, he learned to make bread at his father's bakery in the L.S. Ayers department store in downtown Indianapolis. At a recent Shortridge High School reunion in Indianapolis, he was easily the oldest graduate in attendance. Vern considered studying chemistry at Purdue until the school's legendary Dean of Engineering A. A. Potter said to him, "You don't want to study that stinky stuff, do you?" In response, Vern embarked on a lifetime love of mechanical engineering and earned his Bachelor's degree in 1942. In those pre-World War II days, Purdue was short on women but Vern captivated the best of the best in Gwen, his wife for 67 years prior to her passing in 2010.

In March of 1943, Vern began his WWII Army Air Corps assignment at Packard Motor Car Company in Detroit. He was instrumental in completely redesigning and upgrading the Rolls Royce Merlin aircraft engine, which went on to power the fastest propeller-driven aircraft of WWII, the P51 Mustang. With GI bill support following the war, Vern returned to Purdue to obtain Masters and PhD degrees in Aeronautical and Electrical Engineering, respectively. Together, they raised three rambunctious boys to academic and career success (for which Vern could never hide his pride). Always the do-it-yourselfers, Vern and Gwen designed and built two houses, a backyard swimming pool and two camping trailers, one of which made an eventful round-trip journey to Alaska in 1961. Around 1955, Vern had a chance encounter with Ralph Teetor, founder and President of Perfect Circle Corporation in Hagerstown, who had been struggling to design a mechanical speed control device for automobiles. Ralph wondered if Vern could design something using electronics to replace pulleys and cables. After a few weeks, Vern returned with an early prototype of cruise control devices used today in automobiles throughout the world. Mr. Teetor hired this early techie to lead his newly created electronics division at Perfect Circle. Later, Vern founded, and led as president, Dynamic Precision Controls Corporation in Hagerstown, an early innovator in automotive and industrial testing systems. In his later years, he consulted on projects throughout the United States including development of production line monitoring equipment for Miles Labs, the maker of Alka-Seltzer.

Vern was active in Rotary International for over 60 years, serving as District 656 Governor in 1982-83 and maintaining a perfect attendance record with the Richmond club until just last month. He was President of the Indiana Society of Professional Engineers in 1978-79, helped found the Whitewater Valley chapter of the organization, and was the 1967 ISPE Engineer of the Year. Local citizens elected Vern to 7 consecutive 4-year terms on the Wayne County Advisory board from Dalton Township and he served as a board

member of the Nettle Creek School Corporation. Like his father, Vern was a 32nd Degree Mason with the Indianapolis Valley Scottish Rite and maintained affiliation with the Hagerstown Lodge #49 F&AM. As a 60-year member of the Hagerstown Congregational Christian Church, United Church of Christ, Vern's faith was his conviction and comfort while his deep bass voice anchored the back row of the choir. Vern was also a member of American Legion Post 333, Hagerstown.

The outdoors called Vern throughout his life, especially the National Parks. Whether it was camping in Rocky Mountain, climbing the ladders of Mesa Verde, awestruck in Grand Canyon, hiking Yosemite or frying wild blueberry pancakes at dawn in Denali, the parks always shifted Vern from his beloved transistor, gear and steel world, to a quieter, contemplative state. For many summers, canoe trips to Minnesota's Boundary Waters did the same. He even experimented with growing high quality wine grapes and successfully produced wine in Indiana, formidable challenges. In the 1983 Indiana State Fair home wine competition, his "Spring Hill White Sparkling Wine" (Méthode Champenoise) won the competition.

Vern outlived his three sisters Betty (1916-2012), Constance (1914-17) and Lazetta(1913-14). With love and dedication, he cared for Gwen while she lived at home with Alzheimer's disease. He is survived by his three sons Vern, Burton, and Jeffry, their wives Lynne, Carletta and Kit, five grandchildren (Daniel, Karina, Patricia, Will, and Andreis), and brother-in-law Richard Curry.

Visitation will be Friday, April 14 from 6-8 PM with services Saturday, April 15 at 10:30 AM, both at Culberson Funeral Home in Hagerstown. A Masonic ceremony will be held at 7:45 PM on Friday.. Vern will be buried in the family plot at Crown Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis next to his parents, sisters, and Gwen.

Cemetery Details

Crown Hill Cemetery

700 W. 38th St
Indianapolis, IN 46208

Previous Events

Visitation

APR 14. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Culberson Funeral Home - Hagerstown
51 South Washington Street
Hagerstown, IN 47346
(765) 489-5511
info@culbersonfh.com
<https://www.culbersonfh.com/>

Masonic Memorial Service

APR 14. 7:45 PM (ET)

Culberson Funeral Home - Hagerstown
51 South Washington Street
Hagerstown, IN 47346
(765) 489-5511
info@culbersonfh.com
<https://www.culbersonfh.com/>

Service

APR 15. 10:30 AM (ET)

Culberson Funeral Home - Hagerstown
51 South Washington Street
Hagerstown, IN 47346
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<https://www.culbersonfh.com/>

Tribute Wall



“ *Culberson Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Vern C. Vanderbilt Jr.*



Culberson Funeral Home - April 13, 2017 at 10:35 PM

PC

“ *Please accept my sympathies on the death of your father. I met your father in 1978 through the Whitewater Valley Chapter of ISPE. He was an inspiration to many and will definitely be missed. You are in our prayers.*

Phillip G. Conarroe, P.E.

Phillip G. Conarroe - April 15, 2017 at 08:22 AM

DS

“ *Vern was a great humanitarian, friend and Rotarian. I always looked forward to seeing him. My prayers of Thanksgiving and Celebration are with his family. I will long remember him.*

Chuck Simons, PDG, Rotary International

Dr. Charles Simons - April 14, 2017 at 09:14 AM



“ 50 files added to the album *Life Tributes*



Culberson Funeral Home - April 13, 2017 at 10:16 PM

DS

“ Jeff I was sorry to read about your Dad passing. He will surely be missed by many. My thoughts and Prayers are with you and the rest of your family.



(We graduated together in 1973 Jeff.... Deb Wilson back then.)

Debby Strickler - April 13, 2017 at 04:23 PM

MB

“ Melissa & Danielle Harrington and Colin Bonini purchased the *Sentiments of Serenity Spray* for the family of Vern C. Vanderbilt Jr..



Melissa & Danielle Harrington and Colin Bonini - April 13, 2017 at 09:55 AM

SW

“ *In celebration of a life well-lived my sincere condolences, thoughts and prayers to the Vanderbilt family,
Love n Light...
Sandy Waltz*

Sandy Waltz - April 13, 2017 at 09:10 AM



“ *I want to say that I am sorry for your loss. The invention of Cruise Control was something that has benefitted everyone who has ever had to drive a car for any distance. I hope that your father got the credit he deserved for that revolutionary idea.*

Victoria Kidd-Cromis - April 13, 2017 at 08:39 AM

MH

“ *I had the pleasure of being Mr. Vanderbilt's secretary at Dynamic Precision Controls in Hagerstown for approximately 3 1/2 years. I remember he dictated 60 plus pages(shorthand)in one sitting. He was kind enough to let me type out a rough draft with him making corrections where needed. The front office had a wonderful crew of engineers with Mr. Vanderbilt leading. Prayers are for all the families of Mr. Vanderbilt. What a wonderful,fruitful life.*

Mary Humphrey(Smith) - April 12, 2017 at 09:12 PM

LB

“ *So Very Sorry to hear about the passing of your Father. Yes, he did live a full and joyous life. You are in our thoughts and prayers.*

Larry and Julia Bryant

Larry Bryant - April 12, 2017 at 07:05 PM