



Ronald Edmund Birtcher

February 24, 1931 - April 21, 2020

Ronald Edmund Birtcher was born on February 24, 1931 in Orange, California to Fayette and Mary Louise Birtcher.

Likely best known for his accomplishments as an international commercial and industrial real estate developer, Ron was a man of wide and varied interests. As a young boy growing up in Orange County, California, he employed his seemingly boundless energy at jobs that included working as a “smudger” in the orange groves of southern California and mucking horse stalls at the ranches of friends and neighbors. In addition to his passion for horses, he developed an early interest in music, and played the trumpet in the high school band, and even had a short stint as a professional in a 40s-era dance band and carried his love of music through the remainder of his life.

After graduating from Newport Harbor High School in 1948 and attending Santa Ana Junior College and the University of Arizona studying business administration and psychology, Ron returned to Orange County where he worked for a Los Angeles surgical supply company and managed the office of a marine metal fabricator in Newport Beach. While serving in the Naval Reserves, Ron met and married his lifelong bride, Joanne Olson, in 1952 and subsequently had three children.

He turned his attention to the business of real estate and development in

1953, when he accepted a position as the sales manager for the South Hills Country Club in Covina, California. From there, he joined his father, Fayette, in a newly formed construction and development business based in Corona del Mar, and became one of the pioneers of the now-widespread building technique known as “tilt-up” concrete construction used in the creation of commercial and industrial properties around the world. Joined by his brother, Art, in 1961, they founded a family partnership that went on to construct, develop, market and manage well over 40 million square feet of properties from coast to coast, including the Pacific Design Center in West Hollywood and the Los Angeles Wholesale Produce Mart, the largest of its kind in the US.

The Birtcher Real Estate Group’s projects were as innovative and trend setting as the firm’s business strategies. In 1969, Ron and Art formed a venture with Southern Pacific Railroad to become their in-house development company where they maximized development opportunities on the railroad’s 2.3 million acres, nationwide. In 1990, Ron and Art sold 50% of their development and construction company to Mitsui & Co. Ltd, at the time the world’s largest trading company. The LA Times reported “It’s the first time that a Japanese company has bought into a large U.S. real estate developer, and some experts say it signals a major shift in the way that the Japanese are investing in U.S. properties.” In 1996, Birtcher opened an office in China, which prompted another global announcement, when on July 14 1996, the China Daily Business Weekly reported that “With the signing of a contract between Beijing Vantone Industry Co Ltd and Birtcher Enterprises...the contract filled a gap in economic co-operation between the two countries, this being the first time that a Chinese real estate development company has joined hands with a US counterpart in the co-operation of real estate management and development.”

Ron's leadership earned him a number of honors and recognition from industry peers, including the Medal Of Honor from the Building Industry Association in 1988, the prestigious Developer Of The Year in 1989 awarded by the National Association of Industrial and Office Parks; the Entrepreneur Of The Year honors presented by the United States-Mexico Foundation in 1992; and the UCI Center for Real Estate's Person of the Year (Sumigarten Award). Ron was inducted into the California Building Industry Foundation's Builder's Hall of Fame in 1995.

In addition to his activities in real estate, Ron was involved in a wide range of business pursuits that included 110 acre date farm and packing operation in the Coachella Valley; the cultivation and worldwide distribution of exotic protea flowers, grown on the slopes of Haleakala volcano in Maui, Hawaii; and the raising of cabernet sauvignon grapes at his and Joanne's home, Meadowbrook Farm, in his beloved Napa Valley. Centered in the Oak Knoll appellation of the Valley, their fruit was utilized by the Robert Mondavi and Opus One brands. Although farming was a latent passion, fishing was dearest to his heart. Ron owned several boats all of which were named the "Legend" and competed in marlin and tuna tournaments mainly off California and Florida. Ron won a great many of them, mostly with a team comprised of his family. One of Ron's greatest conquests on the water was being perhaps the only person to have ever caught 9 broadbill swordfish on rod & reel in a single season off the coast of Southern California.

His community and philanthropic interests were equally wide-ranging, serving as a board member for several organizations such as the Napa Valley Museum Association; the Coachella Valley Counseling Clinic; the Advisory Board to the University of California, Irvine (UCI) Graduate School of Real Estate. Ron was an active supporter of the Napa Valley Symphony

Association and the Napa Valley Opera House; chairman of the Orange County Sheriff's Association; and served as a director and past president of the YMCA Camping Association of Orange County.

During many of his years in San Juan Capistrano, Ron served as an elder in the Presbyterian Church. Most recently, Ron has pursued his lifelong passion and devotion for his savior, Jesus Christ, through the Birtcher Family Foundation, formed together with Joanne, and based in Napa, California. Having committed his life to Christ at the age of 17, he has actively served within the operation and management of several international Christian Mission organizations in Peru, Chile, Spain, Cambodia, Philippines, Ukraine and Kenya & Tanzania. Through the Birtcher Family Foundation, orphanages, schools and self-sustaining agricultural operations have been seeded and funded for the realization of his vision and desire to spread the Word of the Lord. Ron's life verse was Eph 2:10.

Ronald E. Birtcher passed away peacefully at his Napa home, surrounded by his wife and children, on April 21, 2020. He is survived by his wife, Joanne; his son, Brandon and wife Dorine; his daughter Shelley (McCroskey) and her husband, Brad; his son, Baron and his wife Christina; 9 grandchildren and 15 great-grandchildren.

The family has requested that in lieu of flowers, that a donation be made to the Birtcher Foundation by visiting www.birtcherfamilyfoundation.org. Your contribution will assist in fulfilling Ron and Joanne's vision to provide the desperately needed care and hope to the neediest around the world all in the name of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Cemetery Details

Pacific View Memorial Park

3500 Pacific View Dr.
Del Mar, CA 92625