

Celebrating a Legend

Richard W. Brown, 1921-2003

If the hospitality business conducted a poll to discover who among its countless thousands has devoted more time, energy and ideas, traveled more, and helped to raise funds to advance the industry's interests, Richard W. Brown would likely top the list.

Dick Brown passed away peacefully in the company of family and friends in Williamsburg, Virginia on September 4, 2003.

A 1949 graduate of the Hotel School, Brown was active in the hospitality field for more than 50 years. His loyalty to his employers was legendary, beginning early in his career when he sold sundae toppings and root beer in Rochester, New York. "Every friend and neighbor learned to love root beer," said son Gary. "No one wanted to face Dick Brown with a Coke or Pepsi in hand."

Brown went on to hold senior posts in trade associations, including treasurer of the New Jersey Restaurant Association, co-founder of the Rochester branch of the New York State Restaurant Association, and executive vice president and secretary of the National Restaurant Association.

Throughout his career Brown showed the same loyalty to his staff as he did to his employer. Every Christmas morning, when most families were opening gifts, he would take his young sons Gary and Bruce to work. He could not imagine celebrating Christmas without first visiting his staff, who had to work on Christmas day in the kitchens and bakeries he supervised.

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After his association work Brown spent six years as director of corporate marketing for two major producers and importers of wines and spirits, Schenley Affiliated Brands Corp., and The American Distilling Company. In 1979 he joined Banfi Vintners, America's largest wine importer and a major producer of world-class offerings in Tuscany and Piedmont, Italy. He retired 10 years later as vice president and assistant to the chairman, and continued as a consultant to the firm. "The Mariani family and Dick's associates at Banfi are saddened by the parting of this esteemed colleague, good friend and cherished mentor," said John Mariani, '54, chairman and chief executive officer of Banfi. "His deeds have enriched our past and inspire our future; his

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Much of Brown's recent personal time was devoted to projects that will advance the interests of the food and wine trades. In 1991, and again in 1992, he volunteered as an evaluator of the U.S. Army Connelly Program, which required him to study food operations at Army posts in six U.S. states, Korea, Germany and Panama. He made two six-week tours traveling with the perks and privileges of a Brigadier General, which he claims wasn't bad duty for an old World War II buck sergeant. More recently, he performed a similar service for the U.S. Coast Guard. He had been twice honored for his efforts by the U.S. Army, which made him an honorary member of the Quartermaster Corps, and later enrolled him as a "Distinguished Member of the Quartermaster Regiment."



Dick Brown '49 was honored with the Hotelier of the Year Award at the Tavern on the Green in New York City in 1986.



Dick Brown in the 1252 Infantry Company, 1940.

Brown's good works only began there, however. When his alma mater tapped him to serve as vice chairman of the Leadership Campaign for the Cornell Hotel School, he helped raise \$43 million over two years. Four years later in 1996, Cornell bestowed upon Brown the Frank H.T. Rhodes Exemplary Alumni Service Award.

Colgate University also sought his expertise to conduct a feasibility study that would improve the efficiency and profits of the school's inn and coffee shop. Until recently, Brown, on Banfi's behalf, conferred with four schools—Cornell, Johnson & Wales, Culinary Institute of America and University of Nevada-Las Vegas—on the renovation and upgrading of dining and classroom facilities originally built with contributions from the Banfi Foundation.

In between such assignments, he served as vice chairman of the Culinary Institute of America (he was a trustee emeritus); a fellow of the Educational Institute of the American Hotel/Motel Association; past president of the Cornell Society of Hotelmen and the Cornell Alumni Association; and managing director of Cayuga Hospitality Advisors.

"Dick contributed in every possible way to the mission of the Hotel School."

David Butler, Dean

To honor Brown's exceptional service to the School, the Cornell Hotel Society has endowed in his name a tiered case study room in the School's addition, the Robert A. and Jan M. Beck Center. The Richard W. Brown '49/Cornell Hotel Society Amphitheatre will be a 60 seat state-of-the art room fully outfitted for multimedia presentations.

"Dick contributed in every possible way to the mission of the Hotel School," said David Butler, Dean. "He co-chaired the fundraising efforts to renovate Statler Hall in the late 1980s, mentored countless Cornell students and alumni over six decades, and made connections far and wide that have been vital to the School's outreach. Few individuals have done so much for the School on so many fronts."

Brown loved to spend time with students, too, and was often found lecturing



Muriel and Dick at the Kapalua Bay Golf Course in Maui, Hawaii, 1979.



The Brown Family in Vancouver, British Columbia in 1986. From left, Gary, Bruce, Dick and Muriel.

to aspiring hoteliers and restaurateurs at undergraduate schools around the country. In 1986, the academic world formally inducted him into its ranks when Johnson & Wales University awarded him a doctorate in Business Administration (honoris causa). At times he sought a broader audience and played the role of evangelizer at public wine tastings, winning over the crowd with appreciative smacking lips and breezy, amusing chatter as he led them swirling, sniffing and sipping their way through a selection of Banfi's Super Tuscans, noble varietals and rare vintages.

Three other organizations have honored Brown: The New York Chapter of the Cornell Hotel Society named him "Hotelier of the Year" in 1987; the Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education presented him with the prestigious "Industry Recognition Award"; and he received the American Express Travel & Leisure Award.

"Dick was always there for The Hotel School, volunteering his time, effort, and goodwill at every opportunity," said Michael Chiu, '66. "The hospitality industry, hospitality management education, and our School are much the better for Dick's generous participation and contributions."

Brown was married to a Cornellian, the former Muriel Welch, Hum Ec '47. They have two sons, Gary and Bruce, both of whom work in the hospitality trade, and two grandsons. In 1996, the Browns purchased their retirement home in Williamsburg, VA, which he described as "just one step short of Heaven because it is flanked by three golf courses."

(Many thanks to Dick's wife Muriel, and son Gary, for their assistance with this story.)