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# Wiseman-Hughes suburban home builder James Hughes dies at 91

By Susan Sarkauskas

A man who spent a lifetime building thousands of homes throughout the West and South suburbs is being remembered for his devotion to providing quality products.

James P. Hughes Sr., 91, is also remembered for his devotion to supporting Marmion Academy.

The former president of Wiseman-Hughes Enterprises died Nov. 21.

"He was just a wonderful, wonderful, wonderful man. He had a great, great sense of humor, and wonderful knowledge of the business. He was probably one of the most honorable men I've ever met," said his son, James Hughes Jr., who worked with his father for 40 years.

Born in Indiana, Hughes was raised in the South Side neighborhood of Beverly in Chicago. His first ambition was to become a farmer, likely inspired by his father's ownership of a farm in Dundee Township, said James Hughes Jr. After graduating college in 1942, he enlisted in the Army, serving in the 17th and 82nd Airborne divisions. He received his law degree in 1948 from DePaul University, and practiced real estate law. He later began working as a builder and land developer in Chicago.

In 1961 Hughes formed Wiseman Construction Co. with Jerry A. Wiseman. In 1985, Hughes purchased the remaining shares of the company.

The firm built an estimated 35,000 homes in the South suburbs, Wheaton, Naperville, Plainfield, Oswego, Sycamore, DeKalb, Sugar Grove and North Aurora. His family estimates the firm built one-quarter of the housing stock in Wheaton. He also built apartment buildings, shopping centers and office buildings.

It became a nonperforming entity in 2008, as a result of the recession and housing market bust, but out of it James Hughes Jr. and several other employees formed a new company, Next Generation Development. Until late October, "Senior" came to the office every day.

"He still wanted to know what was going on," James Hughes Jr. said, even during the tough times of the housing crisis, when they were trying to figure out how to rejuvenate the company. "He loved listening to all that."

Hughes managed to fulfill his dream of living on a farm, moving in 1964 to the 800-acre Cloonlara Farm on Hughes Road near Elburn. He grew corn, wheat and soybeans, and raised livestock.

He was an avid White Sox fan, tuning into day games by radio in his office. He supported Marmion Academy and Rosary High School, which his children attended, and was past chairman of the Missionary Vehicles Association. As a Marmion benefactor, he will be buried in the Marmion cemetery, alongside his wife, Dorothy, who died in 2011.

“He loved the Marmion atmosphere,” and the Benedictine philosophy, James Hughes Jr. said. “He was very, very involved.”

Hughes is survived by sons James, Michael and Sean; daughters Maureen McKanna and Sheila Fitzsimmons; and 13 grandchildren.

A wake will be held Thursday at Malone Funeral Home, 324 E. State St., Geneva. A funeral Mass will be celebrated at 10 a.m. Friday in the Abbey Church of St. Augustine at Marmion Abbey, 850 Butterfield Road, Aurora. Memorial gifts may be made to Rosary and Marmion Academy.