



Skip Gage

November 1, 1940 - February 26, 2020

Gage, Skip Surrounded by his loving family, Twin Cities executive and philanthropist Skip Gage died Wednesday, February 26 at the age of 79. He leaves an indelible legacy through his contributions as a business leader; a champion for youth; and a loving husband, father, and grandfather. In each domain, Skip made his mark in an understated way, combining intelligence and creativity with warmth and wit. Edwin Cutting Gage III, "Skip," was born on November 1, 1940 in Evanston, Illinois, the son of Margaret Stackhouse and Edwin Cutting Gage II. Growing up, Skip was an all-around sports champion. He particularly excelled at tennis and played at the state championship level, earning a full athletic scholarship to Northwestern University. Gage became captain of the Northwestern tennis team, leading them to third place in the NCAA Championship, one of the best finishes in the university's history. Gage was named Senior Athlete of the Year. He received both his B.S. in Business and his M.S. in Journalism (Advertising) from Northwestern. The most life-shaping experience of his college years was a blind date where he met fellow Northwestern student Barbara Carlson. The two fell deeply in love, married in 1965, and began a family that grew to four children and 10 grandchildren. Their 55-year bond was at the center of Skip's life. To all who know them, Skip and Barby's enduring love was palpable and remarkable. Gage began his career at the Chicago office of Foote, Cone and Belding as a cadet of advertising's fabled 'Golden Age.' In 1968, the Gages left Chicago when Skip joined his father-in-law, Minneapolis entrepreneur Curt

Carlson, to work at the Gold Bond Stamp Company in Minneapolis. As the new director of marketing, development, and research, Gage described himself as "A one-and-one-half person department and the first Gold Bond employee with sideburns." From 1968 until 1982, through acquisition and internal development, Gage built what came to be known as the Carlson Marketing Group. He moved the company into related businesses and most famously, in 1978, recognizing the huge opportunity created by the Airline Deregulation Act, Gage incubated a travel business. At Carlson, Gage was described as "long on detail, compulsively well organized, and an architect of operating systems. He steep himself in numbers, possesses a prodigious wealth of organizational knowledge that subordinates say is truly daunting. He rates high on people skills and team-building ability." (Corporate Report/Minnesota, June 1987). In the early 1980s, Skip was instrumental in defining Carlson's strategic direction to focus on fewer high-margin businesses where he saw the opportunity for market leadership. In 1984, he was named president and COO and then in 1989 he was named Carlson's second CEO, following founder Curt Carlson. "The line on Skip Gage is unwaveringly consistent. He is his own person. He is confident, but without a hint of cockiness. He is self-controlled and yet surprisingly approachable. Gage is like the guy next door, well-balanced, and circumspect. Where Curt Carlson is intuitive and spontaneous Skip Gage is analytical and deliberate." (Corporate Report/Minnesota, June 1987) In late 1991, the recession, a drop in global travel, revised succession planning, and a desire to start something new led to Gage's resignation as CEO. Gage purchased four fulfillment businesses from the Carlson portfolio, beginning a series of acquisitions that, in combination with organic growth, built the powerful platform of the Gage Marketing Group. Only one year after its founding, Advertising Age named Gage Marketing the number one sales-promotion agency in America. The firm also made a mark as an early digital innovator. Tom Belle, Gage's partner and colleague of 36 years, recalled, "Skip was a visionary and he inspired those of us who were lucky enough to work with him to reach farther than we thought

we could possibly reach. He was just that kind of a leader. Skip really believed that 'good people made good business.' Every day he stressed that ethical behavior was the most important attribute a professional could possess." Skip's life philosophy was rooted in seeking paths to empower others. Gage will be particularly remembered for his work as Chair and then Chair Emeritus of the Inner City Tennis Foundation. The U.S. Tennis Association (USTA) recently elected Gage to the USTA Hall of Fame citing his life-long leadership in making tennis a vehicle to provide mentoring and create opportunity for under-resourced youth. Skip and Barby partnered in other philanthropic efforts to serve the community, engaging with the Northside Achievement Zone, Urban Ventures and Banyan Community. He was the recipient of the University of Minnesota Regents Award, (2015); Northwestern University Medill School of Journalism Hall of Achievement, (2009); The Twin Cities Business Minnesota Outstanding Directors Award, (2007); and Entrepreneur of the Year, Upper Midwest Service, (1999). Skip never forgot to prioritize time for family and fun. He played the guitar each night for his children when they were growing up. His daughter Christy recalled that her dad's nighttime lullaby was Jim Croce's "Bad Bad Leroy Brown." Hunting and fishing excursions were frequent a way for Skip to enjoy nature and the company of family and friends. Barby and Skip shared years of playing golf and tennis, and many cozy and quiet hours reading together. They frequently gathered family members at their home in Hawaii savoring an evening ritual to watch the sun set over the ocean. Each of them will treasure the memory of Skip in the beauty and peace of sunsets to come. Skip is survived by his wife Barbara Carlson Gage; children Geoffrey Gage (Kelly), Scott Gage (Gina), Christy Gage, and Richard Gage (Britt); and grandchildren Patrick, Emma, Camden, Becan, Abigail, Tenley, Kylie, Emerson, Sayer, and Ellie. Memorial Services will be held Wednesday, March 4 at 4:00 p.m. at the Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church, 511 Groveland, Minneapolis. In lieu of flowers, contributions in Skip's memory may be made to Inner City Tennis or Urban Ventures.

Previous Events

Church Service

MAR 4. 4:00 PM - 5:00 PM (CT)

Hennepin Avenue United Methodist Church
511 Groveland Avenue
Minneapolis, MN 55403