

Robert Cohen



PEORIA — Robert S. "Bob" Cohen, chairman and founder of Cohen Development Company, died Wednesday, June 3, 2009, at his home in Peoria. He was 80.

He was an executive and business owner in furniture retailing and retail real estate in a career spanning six decades.

After attending Harvard Business School MMP Program in 1956, Mr. Cohen joined the training program at Jordan Marsh, then a prominent Boston-area department store. In 1959, he returned to Peoria and joined the family furniture business, Cohen Furniture Company, founded by his grandfather. In the early 1960s, after a fire at the downtown Pekin Cohen's store, Mr. Cohen relocated the furniture store, together with a new Kroger and Super X drugstore, on Broadway, creating Broadway Village Shopping Center in Pekin. An interest in retail real estate development was born. In 1970, he left Cohen Furniture and founded Cohen Development Company. Over the next 40 years, he would be involved in the development, ownership and management of several shopping centers and hotels throughout Illinois, including Westlake Shopping Center in Peoria, which Mr. Cohen developed in 1973 to coincide with the opening of the new Northwoods Mall.

Robert Stanley Cohen was born July 10, 1928, to Louis B. Cohen of Peoria and Ruth Levenberg Cohen of Chicago. He grew up in Peoria and lettered in four varsity sports at Peoria High School, from which he graduated in 1946, followed by a postgraduate year at Cheshire Academy. He attended Stanford University and graduated from Bradley University in 1951.

He then served as an officer in the U.S. Navy during the Korean War, and was stationed in Japan in 1952.

In 1956, he completed the Harvard Business School MMP Program, where he was also the class tennis champion.

On June 28, 1956, he married Esther Rotenberg (surviving) of Boston, Mass. They were di-

vorced in 1992.

They had three children, Sheryl R. Cohen (Michael Bork) of Peoria, Leslie B. "Les" (Melissa) Cohen of Edwards and Jennifer E. Cohen of St. Louis. They all survive, along with a grandson, Julian B. Cohen of Edwards.

He spent the last years of his life with his devoted companion, Shirley Harper of Peoria. She also survives.

He was preceded in death by his parents and one sister, Inette.

Mr. Cohen was a 39-year member of The International Council of Shopping Centers and an Illinois real estate broker. He also was a member of Mar-A-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla.; a 35-year member of The Country Club of Peoria and The Rotary Club of Peoria, where he was a Paul Harris Fellow; and a 50-year member of the American Legion. He was a past member of the board of directors of the W.D. Boyce Chapter of Boy Scouts of America, the Bradley B Club Board, Bradley Alumni Board and Sigma Chi Fraternity at Bradley, of which he was the first chapter president in 1949.

He played the piano by ear and composed music. One of his original compositions, "Champagne and Roses," was performed in 1969 by the Peoria Symphony Orchestra.

An Eagle Scout who once taught fly-tying and casting as a young camper at Strongheart in Wisconsin, duck hunting and fishing remained among his life's most enduring passions.

Services will be at 11 a.m. Sunday at The Wilton Mortuary in Peoria. Visitation will be from 9:30 a.m. until time of the services. Burial will be in Springdale Cemetery in Peoria.

In lieu of flowers, donations should be made to The Prostate Cancer Research Foundation, www.prostatecancerfoundation.org; Bradley University; the Peoria Art Guild, www.peoriaartguild.org; Wildlife Prairie State Park; or any charity of the donor's choice.

Online condolences may be sent to the family at www.thewiltonmortuary.com.



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