**True H. Knowles**
1937-2020

True Harold Knowles, 82, former president and chief operating officer of Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Cos., Inc., past chairman of NutraSweet Co., and former Procter & Gamble executive, passed in Dallas, TX, on February 27th. Elizabeth Ann Dielmann Knowles, his wife of 31 years, was with him when he passed peacefully at their Dallas home. Knowles is also survived by sons, True Jackson Knowles and Michael Harold Knowles; first wife, Judy Jackson Knowles; five grandchildren; and eight nieces and nephews.

A private family only burial for the native Kansan will be at the Quincy, KS cemetery on Saturday, March 7th.

The son of Marge and Harold Knowles, True was born on September 9, 1937, in Eureka KS, and grew up in the Flint Hills grasslands east of Wichita. He graduated from El Dorado (KS) High School, attended Butler County Community College (1955-1957), and graduated with a B. S. degree in geology in 1960 from Wichita State University. Knowles next joined F. G. Holl Oil Co. in Wichita as an exploration geologist, working there until 1963, when he began a 19-year-long sales career with Procter & Gamble, starting in Wichita, KS as a sales rep in the firm’s soap division. He built a distinguished career at P&G, rising through numerous sales management positions to become sales manager and marketing manager.

In 1982, Knowles came to Dallas-based Dr Pepper Co., as vice president/general manager of the soft drink maker’s fountain and food service division. In 1986, he became Sr. VP-sales for all domestic sales entities, including Dr Pepper USA’s bottle/can and fountain food service divisions as well as Premier Beverages, Inc. In 1987, Dr Pepper Company purchased St. Louis, MO-based The Seven-Up Co., and over the next six years, the combined enterprise created a series of successful refinancing schemes with a mission to eventually take the highly-leveraged, privately held firm public.
Knowles was named executive VP and chief operating officer of Dr Pepper Company in July 1988, and also VP of the fountain/foodservice division of Seven-Up and Senior VP of the new Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Companies, Inc. He became the fourteenth president in the 105-year history of Dr Pepper Company in October 1990. During his presidency, Knowles was chiefly responsible for the reformulation and repositioning of Diet Dr Pepper, using the artificial sweetener aspartame. The repackaged soda brand was quickly accepted by the public, critics, the beverage trade press as an industry-wide, diet soda all-star, capturing the distinctive taste characteristics of its parent, non-cola flavor, Dr Pepper. New Diet Dr Pepper experienced double-digit percent-of-increase growth in sales for five straight years under Knowles’s leadership. He had so many superior minds working with him: the late Charles Obusek and the late Jack Kilduff, Michael McGrath, Gilbert Cassagne, Rick Wach, Bill Perley, John Tomescko, Bill Tolany, John Clarke, Jim Watkins and Jim Ball.

Knowles soon developed strong relationships with two instrumental industry figures: innovative marketer, the late Roger Enrico, president and CEO of PepsiCo Beverages and Foods (later PepsiCo CEO), and the late Henry Schimberg, former CEO of Coca-Cola Enterprises, the domestic and eventual global bottling network for distributing Coca-Cola and Dr Pepper products. Later, some 80 percent of Dr Pepper and Seven-Up brands were distributed via CCE and Pepsi’s bottling groups, mutually benefiting the bottom lines and growth of all three soft drink companies.

Sales, profitability, and market share continued to rise, and by January 1993, the Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Cos., Inc., and with new financing in place, began trading on the New York Stock Exchange (Keurig-Dr Pepper [KDP/NYSE] since 2018). In 1995, Cadbury Schweppes purchased all outstanding shares of Dr Pepper and became owner of 90 percent of Dr Pepper/Seven-Up Companies, Inc.
After retiring that year, Knowles became a director of Cott Corporation, the largest producer of store-branded soft drinks in North America and Wendy’s International. He was inducted into the Beverage World Magazine Hall of Fame in 2000, and in 2002, joined the board as chairman of NutraSweet Company, the recognized leader in high-intensity sweeteners. His later career included chairman of the board of directors of Sunny Delight Beverages.

Knowles was long active at Wichita State University. He was the school’s Newcomer Award recipient in 1996; Barton School Advisory Board member since 1995; Fairmont Society Life Member; Society of 1895 member; WSU Alumni Association Achievement Award recipient, 1995; WSU National Advisory Council member, 1995; WSU Foundation Executive Committee Officer-Secretary, 2004; WSU Foundation Board of Directors, 2000-2005; Executive in Residence at the Center for Entrepreneurship, 1994; We Are Wichita State Campaign Cabinet Chair, 2004-2007; and recipient of the prestigious WSU President’s Award, 2006.

Knowles was preceded in death by his parents, Harold and Marjorie and his niece, Courtney Chambers. In addition to his wife, Elizabeth, his first wife, Judy and sons, True, his wife Shannon Petree Knowles and Michael, he is survived by grandchildren, Grant Patrick Knowles, True Alexandra Knowles, Mason Christopher Knowles, Carter Alexander Knowles, and Avery Caroline Knowles; nieces and nephews, Sarah, Jeffrey, Olivia and Davis Hightower, Laura and Alexandra Gibson, Elizabeth and Zeke Richardson, Drew Dielmann, Sydney Dielmann, Finn Connolly, Payton Connolly, George Connell and Drew Chambers.
In lieu of flowers, donations may be given to:

1) **True H. Knowles Memorial for the WSU Barton School of Business - Woolsey Hall**, c/o WSU Foundation, 1845 Fairmount, Campus Box 2, Wichita, KS 67260-0002, [https://foundation.wichita.edu/current-memorials](https://foundation.wichita.edu/current-memorials)

2) **Butler Community College Foundation, In Memory of True Knowles**, [https://forms.butlercc.edu/foundation/give-now.html](https://forms.butlercc.edu/foundation/give-now.html)

3) **Turtle Creek Conservancy for the purchasing and planting of a tree in Turtle Creek Park, “Tree Fund honoring True Knowles”**. Your donation may be made on line at [turtlecreekconservancy.org](http://turtlecreekconservancy.org).