

Former Aerospace Company Exec McDonnell Dies

Jim Suhr, Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Sanford "Sandy" McDonnell, a former Boy Scout who went on to work on the first atomic bomb before heading aerospace behemoth McDonnell Douglas Corp., has died, according to Boeing Co., which bought McDonnell Douglas in 1997. He was 89.

McDonnell, McDonnell Douglas' former chairman and chief executive, had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in November 2010 and died Monday at his home in the St. Louis suburb of Clayton, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported.

"The people of Boeing extend our deepest sympathies to the McDonnell family, and join them in mourning Sandy's passing," Jim McNerney, chairman, president and CEO of Chicago-based Boeing, said in a statement Tuesday. "Sandy's commitment to his colleagues and customers, his country and his community during his 40-year career and throughout his lifetime was extraordinary."

McDonnell, the nephew of McDonnell Aircraft founder James McDonnell, served as CEO from 1972 and became chairman eight years later after his uncle's death. Sanford McDonnell retired in 1988 and was succeeded by John McDonnell, a James McDonnell son who was serving as company president and chief operating officer.

John McDonnell later guided the corporation through its merger with Boeing and still holds a seat on Boeing's board of directors.

"Frankly, I feel vigorous enough to continue working full-time for several more years," Sanford McDonnell said in announcing his retirement more than two decades ago. "But I've long believed that no one should remain in the top position at a major corporation much beyond the age of 65, and retiring now is a way of practicing what I preach."

Princeton-educated McDonnell joined McDonnell Aircraft Co. in 1948, after spending two years during World War II in the New Mexico desert playing a role in the top-secret Manhattan Project that developed the world's first atomic bomb.

With the company, McDonnell held various positions of increasing responsibility in the ensuing years, along the way helping develop the F-4 Phantom II fighter jet. He became vice president of project management in 1959, a member of the board of directors in 1962 and president in 1966.

He was elected a director of McDonnell Douglas — the military plane-maker famous for the F-4 Phantom, Saturn rocket and Mercury and Gemini space capsules — when the corporation was formed through the merger of McDonnell Aircraft and Douglas Aircraft Co. of California in 1967. He was named the corporation's president in 1971 and CEO the following year.

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Under McDonnell's watch, McDonnell Douglas built the Skylab space station in 1973.

After retirement, McDonnell started what he called a "second career devoted to character development," serving as chairman of a character-education effort he founded in 1988 for St. Louis-area schools and formerly called PREP — Personal Responsibility Education Process.

He also headed the board of the Character Education Partnership Inc. in Washington, D.C., a national organization designed to develop moral character and civic virtue in young people.

A memorial service is planned for March 28 at the St. Louis area's Ladue Chapel Presbyterian Church.

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