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Published on Industrial Maintenance & Plant Operation (<http://www.impomag.com>)

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TOKYO (AP) — Eiji Toyoda, a member of Toyota's founding family who helped create the super-efficient "Toyota Way" production method, has died. He was 100.

Toyoda, a cousin of the Japanese automaker's founder Kiichiro Toyoda, died Tuesday of heart failure at Toyota Memorial Hospital in Toyota city, central Japan, Toyota said in a statement.

Eiji Toyoda served as president from 1967 to 1982, engineering Toyota's growth into a global automaker. He became chairman in 1982, and continued in advisory positions up to his death.

He spent his early years on the shop floor, and helped pioneer Toyota's reputed just-in-time production to cut waste and empower workers for continuous improvement or "kaizen."

A graduate of the prestigious University of Tokyo with a degree in mechanical engineering, he joined Toyoda Automatic Loom Works in 1936.

Toyota started out as a loom maker, founded by Kiichiro Toyoda's father Sakichi. Eiji Toyoda's father was Sakichi's brother.

During his years at the helm of what is now the world's biggest automaker, Eiji Toyoda led the development of the Toyota Corolla, which has become one of the best-selling cars of all time. He also pushed Toyota to develop luxury vehicles, which later became the Lexus brand.

One of Japan's most respected businessmen, Toyoda was also one of the main figures to forge Toyota's partnership with General Motors Co. to set up a joint plant in Fremont, California called NUMMI, New United Motor Manufacturing, in 1984. NUMMI closed in 2010.

Toyoda is survived by his three sons, Kanshiro, Tetsuro and Shuhei, all executives at Toyota affiliates. A private family funeral is planned.

Source URL (retrieved on 09/21/2014 - 8:46pm):

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