

Obituary: Donald H. Jones / Elder statesman of high-tech community in Pittsburgh

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Donald H. Jones, entrepreneur and venture capitalist.

By Jonathan D. Silver Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

Donald H. Jones, an entrepreneur and venture capitalist who rose from humble beginnings on a Westmoreland County farm to found four high-tech companies, hold 15 patents and donate \$1 million to Carnegie Mellon University, has died.

Although his mind remained healthy and vibrant as a managing director of Draper Triangle Ventures, a Downtown venture capital firm with about \$125 million invested in roughly 25 start-up companies, Mr. Jones' body often proved to be an obstacle.

He endured a lifetime of heart trouble and procedures -- he suffered his first heart attack at age 40, according to his son, Tom -- and was known to come to work in the 1990s with a heart monitor attached to his belt.

Mr. Jones died Saturday from pancreatic cancer at his home in the Gateway Towers apartment building, Downtown. He was 75.

But even that diagnosis could not deter him. Three weeks ago, Dave Mawhinney, a Jones protege, met his mentor for lunch at the Wyndham Grand Pittsburgh Downtown.

"He couldn't walk anymore. But he came in his scooter," Mr. Mawhinney said. "When we were done he went back to work. That's what he lived for -- he lived for being in the game, to seed new innovative things, to help the other partners at Draper Triangle to sort of invent the future."

Mr. Jones similarly spent years seeding fertile young minds in his role as an adjunct professor at CMU's Tepper School of Business from 1989 to 2003.

Although Mr. Jones graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 1959, it was CMU that became the beneficiary of his largesse in 1989, when he donated \$1 million to the then-Graduate School of Industrial Administration.

Today, Mr. Mawhinney runs the Donald H. Jones Center for Entrepreneurship.

"When he had made his fortune and he endowed the Don Jones Center for Entrepreneurship, he didn't just give money, he gave time," Mr. Mawhinney said.

The oldest of five children, Mr. Jones decided early on that the rural, agricultural lifestyle was not for him. He graduated from Franklin Regional High School in 1955 and headed to college. The year that he earned his degree in electrical engineering, Mr. Jones married his high school sweetheart.

In one of his early jobs in the decade before he founded his first company, Mr. Jones helped to create an injection pump for Medrad, a medical parts subsidiary of Bayer, Tom Jones said.

"They were pioneering the early technologies to ultimately be able to perform what's commonly used today in cardiac catheterizations," his son said. "Little did he know that what he was inventing would be used on him many, many times."

True to his entrepreneurial spirit, Mr. Jones took a different approach to his medical ailments. He immersed himself in the study of medicine, religiously reading the American Journal of Medicine, his son said, and even enrolling himself in online continuing medical education courses.

"He was a pioneer in just about everything he did, even in how he was taken care of because some of the stents that he had placed in his aorta were really cutting-edge and brand-new techniques that were custom-designed for him," Tom Jones said.

Starting in 1968, Mr. Jones followed a pattern of forming companies and selling them. He launched Control Systems Research that year, a maker of computer-driven control systems for factory automation. He sold it eight years later.

Mr. Mawhinney said there were no venture capital funds in that era. Instead, Mr. Jones was put in contact with Pittsburgh businessman Myles Berkman, who became an angel investor and got Mr. Jones started.

"He brought everything to the table -- his brilliance, his knowledge of working with people, his understanding of complex engineering and complicated

situations and business," Mr. Berkman said. "His ethics were beyond reproach and his interest in and love of his family never fell short. That was always paramount."

In 1979, Mr. Jones founded Technology Recognition Corp., publisher of "Who's Who in Technology Today." He sold it in 1981. The next year, he founded International Cybernetics Corp., which developed advanced industrial robotic systems. He sold it after three years.

Finally, in 1990 he founded Automation News Network, which became Industry.Net. The company that began life as an online business-to-business directory, grew rapidly, pulling in revenue of \$30 million three years after starting up, Tom Jones said.

But things fell apart when the company hired a high-profile businessman -- Jim Manzi, who ran Lotus, the spreadsheet developer -- to run it. A clash of cultures ensued between the company's operations in Pittsburgh and Cambridge, Mass. In 1997, the company filed for bankruptcy protection and eventually was dissolved.

Mr. Mawhinney referred to Mr. Jones as the Pittsburgh high-tech community's elder statesman. Mr. Jones served on various boards, including those of Murrysville-based Respirationics and the Carnegie Science Center. He also advised PNC Bank when it launched a private equity group in the 1980s, Mr. Mawhinney said.

In addition to his son, Mr. Jones is survived by his wife, Barbara; daughters Amy Teele of O'Hara and Autumn Katarincic of Fox Chapel; a brother, Leland of Export, and a sister, Beverly Taylor of Oakmont. A memorial service will be held Jan. 6 at Fox Chapel Presbyterian Church.