

Charles E. “Chuck” Swanson Biography



Charles E. “Chuck” Swanson - Class of 1946 - (Nov. 14, 1927 - April 9, 2012) born in Elgin, IL, the son of Clarence and Florence Swanson, he passed away at his home in North Barrington, IL.

Charles graduated from Elgin High School in 1946, where he was captain of the basketball team, one of the top ranked teams in the state of Illinois.

Upon graduation, Charles enlisted in the U. S. Army and served for eighteen months. More than a year was spent in the occupation of Japan, following World War II, where he became an Operations Sergeant.

Charles graduated from Northwestern University in 1951 as an Industrial Engineer. He was a member of the varsity basketball team at Northwestern. In 1956 he received an MBA from the University of Chicago. After graduating from Northwestern he joined the Elgin National Watch Company as a management

trainee and was with the company until 1957, serving as Director of Economic Research. He left to join Curtiss Wright Corp as Director of Pricing for Major Projects. A year later he joined Arthur Young as a consultant in Management Services, where he became a Principal with the firm.

After doing extensive consulting works at Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. for several years, he joined Britannica in 1962 as Director of Administration for International. In 1964 he was elected Vice President/International. Later that year he was appointed Managing Director of Encyclopedia Britannica of Canada, Ltd., assuming responsibility for the company’s Canadian operations. In 1966 he returned to the home office in Chicago and was elected Executive Vice President of the parent company.

In Sept. 1967, at the age of 39, Mr. Swanson was elected President and Director of Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc. He became the youngest ever to hold that office since the Encyclopedia Britannica was first published in 1768. The Encyclopedia Britannica is the oldest continuously published reference work in the English language. Mr. Swanson served in that capacity for eighteen years, longer than any President of Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

He guided the publishing giant through nearly two decades of extensive changes. During his administration the monumental 15th edition of Encyclopedia Britannica, also known as Britannica 3 was moved from the planning phase into execution and actual publication in 1974. At the same time the Britannica enterprise experienced major growth around the world. In joint ventures with foreign partners, Britannica produced the most comprehensive encyclopedia in the French language, Encyclopedia Universalis, completed in 1973, and the Japanese language; Britannica International Encyclopedia, published in 1975.

Britannica subsidiaries created the reference publication and English language instruction programs for French, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, and Chinese speaking people.

Mr. Swanson retired from Britannica in 1986 so his wife, Barbara, and he could spend their winters in Naples, Florida.

Chuck continued to be active as a private inventor. He was a partner in Horizon Capital Partners, and was Chairman and CEO of companies owned and controlled by the Swanson family.

While at Britannica, Chuck was active as a Director and Chairman of the Direct Selling Association. In 1986 he was inducted into the Direct Selling Hall of Fame, the highest honor for distinguished service;

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to the industry and the Direct Selling Association, accomplished through leadership, innovation, personal contribution, and individual achievement. He served on the Board of the Association of American Publishers, he was former board member of the Chicago Better Business Bureau, and the Chicago Council of Foreign Relations.

Mr. Swanson received an Honorary degree of Doctor of Business Administration from Lincoln College. He served as Chairman of the Presidents Fund at the University of Chicago, and Chairman of the Northwestern University Sigma Chi Fraternity fund raising for the chapter house renovation project. Chuck also served as Director of the Conservancy of South West Florida.

He has been a member of The Hole in the Wall Golf Club, The Port Royal Club, the Naples Yacht Club, the Knollwood Club, The Wynstone Golf Club, and the Chicago Club.

He and Barbara Loveday, daughter of the late Thomas and Dorothy Loveday, of Elgin, IL, were married in 1956.

He is survived by his wife, Barbara, children Mark (Karissa) Swanson of Barrington, IL, Kimberly (Robert) Waterman of Bettendorf, Iowa, and Bradford (Elizabeth) Swanson, of Heron, Montana, grandchildren Taylor, Ian, David, Michael, Darby, and Braden. He was preceded in death by his parents and his sister Carol Zornow.

Memorial Visitation will be Friday, April 13, 2012 10:30am until 12pm at Davenport Family Funeral Home, 149 W. Main St, Barrington IL.

Interment will be private.

In lieu of flowers memorials may be made to: Hospice of Northeastern Illinois, 405 Lake Zurich Road, Barrington IL 60010.



Charles Swanson (left), president of Encyclopædia Britannica, inspecting the 15th edition of the encyclopaedia with William Benton, the publisher, and Robert Maynard Hutchins, chairman of the Board of Editors.

Credit: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.