October 16, 2008

AMD Co-Founder, Ed Turney Dies

CUPERTINO, Calif.--(BUSINESS WIRE)--

Ed Turney, one of the eight founders of semiconductor-industry giant Advanced Micro Devices (NYSE:AMD), died yesterday at the age of 79. Brain cancer was the cause, said his brother, George.

A funeral mass will be held at 10 a.m. on Saturday (Oct.18) in the Small Chapel at St. Simons Church, 1860 Grant Road in Los Altos, California, with interment at the Gate of Heaven Cemetery, 22555 Cristo Rey Drive, Los Altos. He will be buried in St. Theresa's Court next to his mother, Rose. Funeral arrangements were handled by Spangler Mortuaries, Los Altos.

In lieu of flowers the family has asked that donations be made to: Center for Children's Brain Tumors, Lucile Packard Foundation for Children's Health, 400 Hamilton Avenue, Suite 340, Palo Alto, CA 94301.

Turney is survived by his younger brother and sister-in-law, George and Joan Turney of Palo Cedro, California, their five children, their children's nine children and several cousins.

Known as "Fast Eddie," Turney's initial assignments at the fledgling AMD involved buying equipment and overseeing construction of the company's first chip factory. At the same time, as director of sales, Turney was charged with building a sales organization, including developing a network of electronic distributors - a vital step in enabling the company to compete with established companies such as Intel, Fairchild, National Semiconductor, Texas Instruments, Motorola and other companies that no longer exist.

Ed Turney "was instrumental in our securing the best distribution network in the United States," said Sanders, now retired. "He built those critical relationships at the distributor level that were key to our business."

His years at AMD, which ultimately became a major force in the semiconductor industry and industry-leader Intel's major competitor, were the zenith in the high-low career of Edwin James Turney.

From pretzels to war materiel to semiconductors, "Ed was the consummate salesman his entire life," said William Welling, a semiconductor veteran who knew Turney for some 45 years.

"Turney gambled on business ventures as well as with a pair of dice and a deck of cards. He made and lost large sums of money," Welling said. "He was always highly leveraged."

Turney was born March 26, 1929, in Brooklyn, N.Y. His father, Edwin Victor Turney, who died when Ed was six, worked on Wall Street until the Crash, and then he became a cab driver. His mother, Rose, who raised the boys, was a telephone operator. (Rose died in 1980.) At an early age Turney showed a penchant for sales. A child of the Great Depression he went

into business when he was 8 years old with his brother George selling pretzels on the streets of Brooklyn for two cents that they had bought for a penny each.

Soon after high school, Turney signed on for a four-year tour with the Navy and became an electronics technician. George soon followed and the brothers served on the same destroyer for two years. They saw action during the Korean War and each was awarded the Korean Ribbon with two battle stars.

"I got out of the Navy in 1957, and shortly thereafter went to work for the Long Island Power Company where they paid me the princely sum of $47 a week," Turney said. From there to the Lansdale Tube Company (a manufacturer of glass vacuum electronic tubes) and then to Philco as a technical representative and salesman to the U.S. military on the North Warning System, formerly known as the Distant Early Warning or Dew Line.

In 1963 Turney met Jerry Sanders who was a regional sales manager in the Los Angeles area for Fairchild Semiconductor, a division of Fairchild Camera and Instrument Corp. Turney joined Sanders and Fairchild, starting a relationship between the two that was to last a dozen years.

"Ed was a hot-shot salesman who would get the order through the force of his personality and drive," said Sanders. "With dogged persistence and great determination and will Ed stood toe-to-toe with guys with more education and made a great success for himself in the semiconductor industry."

Twice Turney would hire Stephen Zelencik, first at Fairchild and later at AMD. Zelencik remembers Turney "as one of the most demanding people I've ever met. If he wanted to talk to you about a customer or a piece of business, he'd hunt you down; call you in the middle of the night, whatever it took to reach you. And then he'd yell."

Turney was "honest, hardworking and a very generous person," added Zelencik, a retired AMD senior vice president. Turney took good care of friends and family, agreed brother George. "When we were in the Navy we sent all of our money except for $5 a month home to Mom. He virtually adopted my five kids," George Turney said.

In late 1974 Turney parted company with Sanders and Advanced Micro Devices. He went on to a succession of small semiconductor manufacturing and distribution companies, very often run by people he had worked with at Fairchild. In his later years he was a consultant to firms trying to get started or funded. "But he never again reached the heights that he had attained at Fairchild and AMD," Zelencik said. "He spent the last 30 years of his life looking for the next big one - seven days a week, 24 hours a day.

    "That being said," Zelencik added, "Ed Turney was a great guy."

"Ed was first and foremost a sales guy," said Marshall Cox, a semiconductor salesman and executive who knew Turney 45 years. "He was classic Brooklyn; fast talking, high energy, a play-hard-work-hard kind of guy that was on top of every aspect of every piece of business. He knew how to get the business. He made his mark and we'll remember him for it."

Source: Advanced Micro Devices, Inc.