

A legend in his own time. An Alabama institution. Best "engineer of people" I ever met. On words like these is the late Walter F. Johnsey ushered into our Hall of Fame. Something approaching awe marks the nomination documents. Colleagues write of substantial obstacles Johnsey overcame and of both genius and generosity that stamped his record.

Indeed, his extraordinary life exemplified remarkable habits of giving and learning and, always, hard work. Work was the lot of an impoverished Alabama boy in a coal town called Sunlight. An underground accident blinded teenaged Johnsey in one eye when he worked in a mine; later, a cave-in would puncture his lung. Yet, he dared to hope for a better life, and to his mind hope equaled education. So, following service in the Army during World War II, Johnsey enrolled at Auburn University. On his own financially, he held many jobs but graduated in the top of his 1949 class, earning a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. With degree in hand, he became an electronics engineer at the Charleston Naval Yard.

Johnsey returned to Alabama in 1951 to join Alabama Power Company. His first decade there focused on underground projects, enhancing safety and efficiency within Alabama's electrical distribution system. He also devised updates for APC's truck fleet, including the first use of aerial lift buckets. Early in the 1960s, he became superintendent of Birmingham-district electric operations, then assistant manager of electric operations company-wide, overseeing budgets in the millions.

Named executive assistant to the chief operating officer in 1964, Johnsey entered a venue that spotlighted his burgeoning expertise. He had never stopped studying, completing curricula in both



WALTER F. JOHNSEY
(1924–2007)
*Electrical Engineer and
Political Powerhouse*

economics and law (JD, 1965). His responsibilities, thenceforward, ranged from coal mine operations to accounting and beyond. He was key in making Dothan's Farley Nuclear Plant—one of the world's best—a reality. In 1979, he retired as vice president and chief financial officer, leaving a legacy of progressive operations; financial vigor; and plentiful, economical electricity for sale.

Johnsey next purchased Perry Supply, a distributor to mines and foundries that he sold in 1986 to Drum-

mond Company, whose chief executive officer found in Johnsey a consummate assistant and executive vice president. CFO would soon augment the title, along with president and CEO of Drummond subsidiary Jasper Corporation.

In his free time, Johnsey pursued wide-ranging business ventures. His entrepreneurial success allowed him to make his most gratifying investments of all: investments in hardworking people. Many were students. Some won scholarships endowed or inspired by Johnsey; others—dozens—saw their tuition paid by him simply because he deemed them promising. Investment in deserving political candidates was another Johnsey staple. Over five decades, he mentored and supported politically ambitious Alabamians whose ideas and characters impressed him. Eighty percent of candidates he supported went on to win their offices.

Johnsey, who enjoyed continuing studies into his 80s, passed away last July, shortly before his 83rd birthday, and was laid to rest in Oak Hill Cemetery in Jasper, Alabama. He is survived by his son, Ron, who was born in the Auburn University infirmary in 1948 and, spurred by his father's example, earned four academic degrees.