12-3-08

OSTER, RICHARD M.

BARRINGTON

OSTER, RICHARD M., 73, of Barrington, a successful financier, philanthropist and civic leader, died Monday, December 1st at Miriam Hospital in Providence. Born in Providence, Rhode Island, he was the son of the late Aaron Joseph Oster and Ruth Leach Oster and the brother of the late Judith Gonicberg.

He was a graduate of The Moses Brown School in Providence and the University of Rhode Island. He was also awarded Honorary Degrees from Brandeis University, Bryant University, Johnson & Wales University, The University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and the New England Institute of Technology.

He began his business career while in high school, working with his father at A.J. Oster Company, a brass manufacturer and supplier in Providence. As President of A.J. Oster, he grew the company into the largest metals supplier in the region and successfully sold the company to Cookson Group plc of London, England in 1979.

After the sale, he joined Cookson Group and led the acquisition and management of more than 40 companies and 20,000 employees worldwide. In 1992, he became Chief Executive of Cookson Group plc. Under his leadership, Cookson Group entered the FTSE 100 with over $3 billion in sales, specializing in electronic materials, engineered products, ceramics and plastics. He retired as Chairman of Cookson in 1997.

Mr. Oster established Cookson's American headquarters in the former Union Station in Providence in the 1980's. The Station's renovations marked one of the early successes in the transformation of modern Providence.

Mr. Oster also served on the Board of The Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, Massachusetts and was also Chairman of The African Development Foundation. He was Chairman of the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority, overseeing the financing, construction and opening of the Rhode Island Convention Center and Westin Hotel in Providence. Mr. Oster served on many boards of directors, including: Meeting Street School, Trinity Repertory Company, Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra, Miriam Hospital, Aurora Civic Association, National Conference of Christians and Jews, Big Brothers of Rhode Island and Volunteer Services for Animals.

Mr. Oster was the first recipient of the American Heart Association's Gold Heart, which later became known as The Richard M. Oster Gold Heart Award, and was a strong supporter of the Providence YMCA.

He was a member of many social organizations, including: Addeville East Farm, Atlantic Tuna Club, Aurora Club, Barrington Yacht Club, The Dunes Club, Holland & Holland Sport Club of England, Labrador Retrievers Club of London, Ledgemont Country Club, Providence Art Club, Rhode Island Country Club, the University Club and Wentworth Country Club, England.

Mr. Oster bred champion Labrador Retrievers and twice was awarded "Best of Breed" at the prestigious Westminster Kennel Club show in New York City. He was also an avid golfer and outdoorsman, enjoying sports fishing and winning the Rhode Island Tuna Tournament in Block Island several times. He also enjoyed photography and shooting.

He is survived by his beloved wife of 37 years, Sandra Dickens Oster, a brother Stephen Oster of Greenwich, Connecticut, Children Roberta and Noah Sachs of Richmond, Virginia; Sara Jane Oster of Peta Luma, California; Jay and Donna Kaufman of Coventry, Rhode Island; Allison and William Dessel of Barrington, Rhode Island; Stephanie and Robert Wilmarth of Rumford, Rhode Island and 7 grandchildren.

Services will be Thursday at Temple Emanu-EL, 99 Taft Avenue, Providence at 11:00 AM. Shiva will be observed at Mr. Oster's late residence on the following days: Thursday 7-9, Friday 12-3, Saturday 7-9 and Sunday 2-4 and 7-9.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the Richard M. Oster Memorial Fund in support of Miriam Hospital.

Arrangements made by Sugarman Sinai Memorial Chapel, Providence.

12-2-08

Richard M. Oster, chairman of Cookson Group, dies

Oster, a resident of Barrington, was also chairman of the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority, which oversaw construction of one of the largest public-works projects in Rhode Island history.

BY G. WAYNE MILLER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Richard M. Oster, who rose to the top of the business world as chairman of the London-based Cookson Group PLC, a multinational company, died yesterday at Providence's Miriam Hospital. A resident of Barrington, he was 73.

"He was a man of action and a great pride to our community and our people," said state Treasurer Frank Caprio, a longtime friend. "He's going to be dearly missed."

Oster, a graduate of the University of Rhode Island, began his business career while in high school working at A. J. Oster Co., a metals supply firm founded by his father, Aaron. Richard Oster eventually became president of the firm, which he sold to Cookson in 1979. Oster joined Cookson at that point.



OSTER

Oster was active in a variety of civic affairs and philanthropic

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Oster

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causes and raised money for Rhode Island Special Olympics and the American Diabetes Foundation, among other groups. In 1987, then Gov. Ed DiPrete named Oster chairman of the Rhode Island Convention Center Authority, which oversaw construction of one of the largest public-works projects in Rhode Island history. The Convention Center opened in 1994.

Oster was awarded honorary degrees from Brandeis University, Bryant University, Rhode Island College and New England Institute of Technology.

Among Oster's nonbusiness passions was breeding Labrador retrievers — two of his dogs won best of breed at New York's prestigious Westminster Kennel Club show — and fishing. He won the Rhode Island Tuna Tournament several times.

In a 1994 Providence Journal profile, Oster said he measured his life by what he had achieved. Whatever he undertook, he said, his goal was to be the best he could be.

"It's just more fun," he said.

While many accolades came his way, Oster said they were not his motivation. His work ethic — inspired by his father, a Russian immigrant who built his own successful company — is what drove him, Oster said. His grandfather, Harry Leach, another Russian immigrant who succeeded in business, was also an influence, Oster said.

"Everyone likes to be liked and respected," Oster told The Journal in 1994. "But that's not prominent in my mind. What's prominent in my mind is to know that I've done what I've done."

A Democrat, Oster considered running for governor in 1998.

"Instead of a dull, political race," he told the Journal in January of that year, "I think it would be especially interesting and colorful and would get people on their toes — whether I won or didn't — and that addressed the real issues instead of sweeping them under the rug."

But three months later, Oster decided against the bid.

Oster is survived by his wife, Sandra, five children and seven grandchildren. Services will be held Thursday at 11 a.m. at Temple Emmanuel in Providence.

gwmiller@projo.com / (401) 277-7380

JUH 12-12-08

Peers remember community leader Richard Oster

RICHARD OSTER, who died on Dec. 1, left a lifetime of memories for people within and without the Jewish community. *The Voice & Herald* was able to connect with a few individuals who knew Oster well.

Matt Shuster remembers his extraordinary generosity within the Jewish community and beyond, particularly in his retirement years. After Shuster introduced him to the JCC executive director, he asked, "What do you need?" When the reply was, "a grand piano," Richard bought a grand piano for the JCC, Shuster said. "He had a good Jewish heart. He was a person who could mix with anyone. He wasn't someone who practiced Judaism by going to *minyan*, but he was always touched by religious people, and he supported the Jewish community in his way." Skippy Weingeroff, who knew Oster for nearly 50 years, recalled, "Dick was a real man's man, he hunted, fished, raised Labrador Retrievers. He became the chief executive officer of a very staid British company (Cookson), which didn't have very many Jews there." There are a million stories about Dick, he said.

DeeDee Witman, remembered that her father, Sanford Zarum, bought Richard his first baseball glove. His wife, Sandra, was there for every bit of his journey as an equal partner, Witman said. "She was the one constant in his life and they had a remarkably devoted marriage. I don't see that kind of devotion today; Sandra wouldn't leave his side when he was ill."

Dick loved his Portuguese water dogs so much; when he had to go to a rehab facility, he brought one of them with him, added Witman.

Governor Donald Carcieri, who Oster hired to work for Cookson in 1983, said, "He was a larger-than -life kind of character. A sportsman, an athlete, a fisherman, an accomplished businessman and wonderful family man. Dick never forgot who he was and where he came from." Carcieri added several other attributes: honesty, integrity, philanthropic to a fault, driven, dynamic, and gregarious. "Dick wouldn't have wanted a lot tears at his funeral, he loved the good times."