SUGARMAN, MITCHELL F., 77, of 1 Butler Ave., Providence, proprietor of the former Max Sugarman and Mt. Sinai Memorial Chapels now the Sugarman-Sinai Memorial Chapel, died Friday at the Philip Hulitar Hospice Center.

A lifelong resident of Providence, he was a son of the late Max and Estelle (Rubin) Sugarman.

Mr. Sugarman served in the Merchant Marines during World War II and attended Brown University before taking over the operations of Max Sugarman Memorial Chapel from his late father. He continued to serve the Jewish Community as a funeral director until retiring in 1998.

Mitchell was a member and served of the Board of Directors of a number of religious, civic and charitable organizations. He was a member of Temple Beth El and it's Brotherhood, Temple Emanu El, Touro Fraternal Association, South Providence Hebrew Free Loan Association, RI Jewish Fraternal Association, Redwood Lodge #35 A.F & A.M., Jewish Federation of RI and the Masonic Grand Lodge. He was a former member of the RI Funeral Directors Association.

He is survived by 2 daughters, Kari Sugarman Jackson of Bedford, NH and Jill E. Sugarman, Esq., of East Greenwich; 3 grandsons, Mason, Scott and Benjamin; 3 brothers, Calvin, David and Louis Sugarman; 1 sister, Rachael Spector; and 2 sons-in-law, Stephen A. Jackson and John J. Kelly, III.

The funeral will be held on Sunday at 1:00 p.m. in SUGARMAN-SINAI MEMORIAL CHAPEL, 458 Hope St., Providence with burial to follow at Lincoln Park Cemetery in Warwick. In lieu of flowers contributions may be made to Temple Beth El, 70 Orchard Ave., Providence, RI 02906 or Temple Emanu El, 99 Taft Avenue, Providence, RI 02906. Shiva to be observed at the home of Jill E. Sugarman, 1600 Frenchtown Rd., East Greenwich, Sunday 7-9 and Monday 2-4 & 7-9 p.m.

SUGARMAN, MITCHELL

Longtime funeral-home owner Mitchell Sugarman dies at 77

His daughters describe him as a workaholic who always made time for his family.

BY ELIZABETH GUDRAIS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Mitchell F. Sugarman, the man whose name was synonymous with Jewish funerals in Rhode Island, died yesterday. He was 77.

Sugarman spent his life in the funeral business. As a child, he helped out at his father's funeral home, the Max Sugarman Memorial Chapel. He dropped out of Brown University to run the chapel, at 458 Hope St., when his father became ill.

Sugarman's two daughters describe him as a workaholic. "He would take phone calls in the middle of the night," Kari Sugarman Jackson, 39, of Bedford, N.H., said. "That was just his thing."

But they said he always made time for his family, taking two weeks off a year to travel with his daughters. "My dad loved my sister and me more than anything in the whole world," Jackson said.

Sugarman and his former wife, Beverly Bromberg, divorced after seven years of marriage. They maintained a friendly relationship for their daughters' sake, living a few blocks apart on Loring Avenue and Blackstone Boulevard, respectively.

Jackson recalled her father coming to visit her at Northeastern University, taking her and her friends out for Chinese food, for no special reason. He paid for his daughters' education at Northeastern and George Washington University, so they could graduate debt-free.

More recently, he would make the 90-minute drive to Jackson's home every three weeks to spend time with her sons, Mason, 10, Scott, 7, and Ben, 4. Jackson kept an Army sweatshirt and a pair of sweatpants at her house for him. It was the only place he didn't wear a suit, she said.

Sugarman "was a gentleman," the kind of man who would always hold doors for women, would take their coats and open their car doors, Jackson said. "He was from another generation."

Her sister, Jill E. Sugarman, said their father never complained — "Everything was always fine-perfect-couldn't-be-better" — and that he couldn't say no to charities or to people in need. "I can't even tell you how many Jewish businesses he lent money to," Sugarman, 37, of East Greenwich, said. "And he never asked for it back."

Mitchell Sugarman attended both Temple Emanu-El and Temple Beth El.

Max Sugarman founded the funeral home when he immigrated from Sweden in 1870. Even after another family, the Boslers, bought the chapel from Mitchell Sugarman and his brothers and sister in 1970, the chapel continued to bear the Sugarman name, while Sugarman operated the Mount Sinai Memorial Chapel farther up Hope Street, where Festival Ballet now sits.

The two funeral homes competed until Service Corporation International acquired them both. In 1999, after Sugarman's retirement, SCI merged the two homes and hired Jill Sugarman, a former lawyer, to run the new Sugarman-Sinai Memorial Chapel, still at 458 Hope St.

Mitchell Sugarman was born Aug. 28, 1927, in Providence. He grew up on Emeline Street and graduated from Hope High School.

He lived most of his adult life on Loring Avenue, though he later moved to Epoch Assisted Living, then, when cancer sickened him, to the Philip Hulitar Hospice Center, where he died.

His funeral is tomorrow, in Sugarman-Sinai Memorial Chapel.