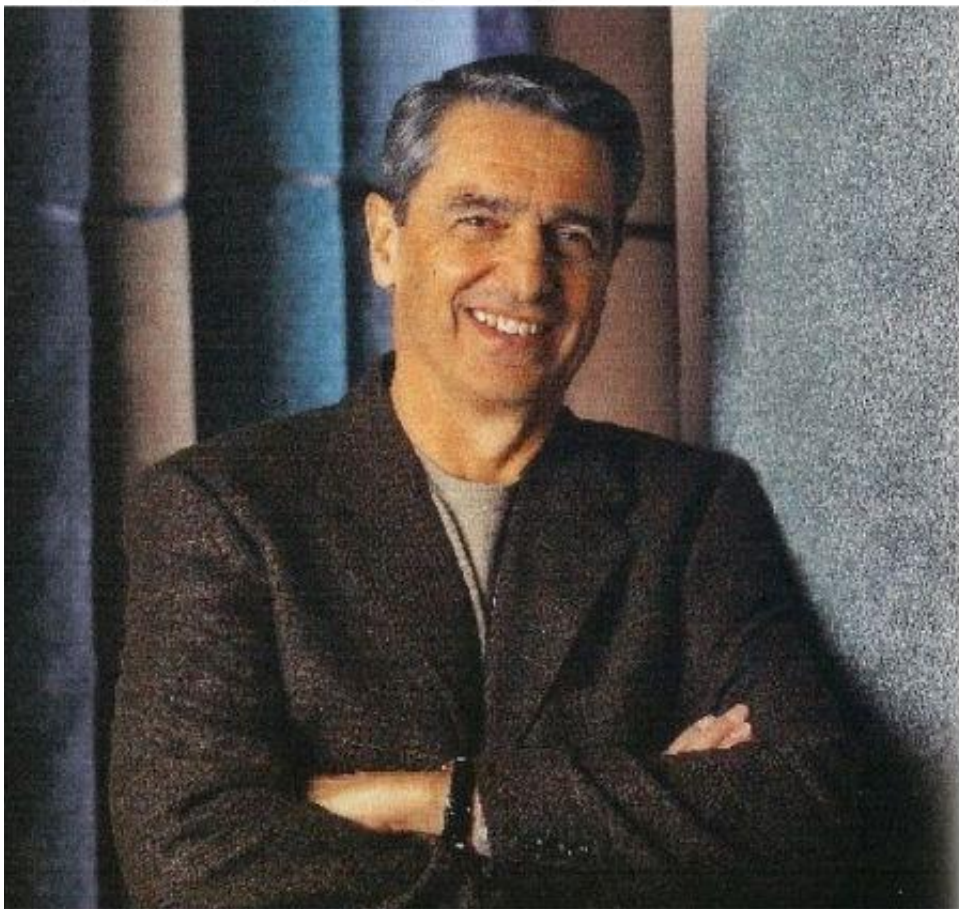


OBITUARIES

JUNE 14, 2023

ROBERT HILL 1936-2023

Business owner co-founded spinal injury support group for families



Robert Hill founded Floor Covering Associates. **RONA TALCOTT**

By **Bob Goldsborough**
For Chicago Tribune

Robert A. Hill founded Shorewood-based Floor Covering Associates in 1976 and oversaw growth that made it the nation's

ninth-largest flooring company, while also co-founding with his wife a Chicago-based nonprofit group that supports families dealing with spinal cord injuries.

"Bob always did the right

thing, which was the honest, the forthright and the fair thing," said Brien Nagle, an attorney for Floor Covering Associates and Hill personally.

Hill, 86, died of heart failure May 1 at Northwestern

Memorial Hospital, said his wife, retired TV producer Thea Flaum. He had been a Near North Side resident.

Born in Oakland, California, Hill received a bachelor's degree in psychology from the University of California at Berkeley in 1958 and then served in the Army as a medic. After his military service, he took a job in the floor covering department of Western Contract Furnishers in San Francisco.

"He was a born salesman," his wife said.

Hill moved to New York as a sales manager for Commercial Carpet Corp. and then for a company called Sponge Cushion. In the early 1970s, he relocated to Naperville, where he was vice president of franchise operations for Carpetland.

In 1976, Hill founded Floor Covering Associates and opened his first store in the middle of a cornfield in Plainfield. He eventually expanded the company to include retail stores selling carpeting, hardwood flooring, ceramic tile, window treatments and some furniture. The firm also has a nationwide buying group and an online business called Efloors.com, which he launched in 1999.

"I've known Bob and have been the beneficiary of his wisdom and unrelenting desire to make our industry better to improve people's lives for over 43 years," said Olga Robertson, president of FCA Network, a buying group for independent retailers that Hill founded. "Bob had a unique ability to recognize talent, and he saw something in me that even I didn't see and gave me the opportunity to shine."

In 1986, Hill's daugh-

ter, Vicki, suffered a spinal cord injury while diving in a swimming pool, and she became quadriplegic. Seeking a way to move forward, Hill and Flaum first sought information on how to deal with both their daughter's condition and its effect on the family.

"We knew from our family's own experience how traumatic a spinal cord injury is not only for the person who, of course, is injured but for the whole family," Flaum said. "One day you're leading your normal life and the next day a family member is injured and as far as we know now, paralyzed for life. And coping with that involves the whole family. So we decided to connect families who suddenly have to deal with a spinal cord injury to people like them who have already been there."

The couple formed the Hill Foundation, which Flaum continues to manage, to provide support and information to families dealing with spinal cord injuries. Their website, FacingDisability.com, contains more than 100 video interviews with family members answering questions about how they cope, as well as interviews with top spinal cord injury experts on important medical subjects.

Hill never retired from Floor Covering Associates. Outside of work, he was interested in everything from astrophysics and computer programming to anthropology and classical music.

"He was always interesting and never boring," Flaum said.

A first marriage ended in divorce. In addition to his

wife, Hill is survived by two daughters, Vicki Kowaleski and Miranda Kotarac; a stepson, Jonathan Flaum; a stepdaughter, Alison Flaum; two brothers, Dennis and Arthur; five grandchildren; three step-grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren;

A private service is being planned.

Goldsborough is a freelance reporter.