



Williams Edward Arant, Jr.

October 29, 1935 - February 10, 2021

Williams (Bill) Edward Arant, Jr., age 85, died peacefully, surrounded by family, at his home in Easton Maryland, on February 10, 2021.

Raised in Manning, South Carolina, Bill started his working life early, at age 10, delivering newspapers across town by bike. He grew up playing baseball, basketball and football – passions he would carry with him through his life, particularly as an avid New York Yankees and Duke Blue Devils fan. His love of jazz was also born in Manning, listening to records with high school friends late into the night, and eventually manifested into a repertoire of jazz standards Bill would sing throughout his life.

After graduating from Duke University with a degree in business administration, Bill started his long career in banking which lasted until he retired at age 83. He served in senior executive positions at First Union Bank (Charlotte and Durham, NC), Wachovia Bank & Trust (Winston-Salem, NC) and Hibernia National Bank (New Orleans, LA). In 1980, he moved to Knoxville, TN where he served either as president or executive vice president at Park National Bank, First Tennessee Bank, SunTrust Bank, SmartBank, and Capital Bank. He helped found First National Bank of Knoxville, serving as the bank's first president and CEO. Along the way, Bill developed a reputation for building meaningful relationships and greeting everyone with an iron handshake. In 2019, Bill retired to the Eastern Shore of Maryland where his wife was raised.

With a strong desire to “create value”, Bill loved giving back to his community, doing so mostly by serving on the boards of numerous organizations, including the Knoxville Zoological Park, the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra, United Way, Greater Knoxville Chamber of Commerce, the Knoxville Downtown Association, and the Federal Reserve Bank – Nashville branch. He was a founding member and lifetime director of Leadership Knoxville which honored him in 2019 with its Distinguished Alumni Award.

Bill is survived by Barbara Unger Arant, his wife of 60 years who he met at Duke; son Williams Edward Arant III; daughter Jenifer Arant Mudd; son-in-law Shannon Brett Mudd;

grandchildren Savannah and Jordan Mudd; sister Yvonne Arant Graham; nephew Winn Graham and his wife Anne; great-nephew Williams Graham (Ashley); great-niece Brooke Graham Ferguson (Mitch); his “angel in a kitty cat suit” Charlie; and a plethora of treasured friends with whom he stayed in close contact over the years. He was predeceased by his father and mother, Williams Edward Arant, Sr. and Evelyn Coskrey Arant.

A graveside service for family will be held in Federalsburg, MD. A memorial service will be held later at a date to be determined. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation in Bill’s honor to the Knoxville Zoological Society (<https://www.zooknoxville.org/donate/tribute-giving/>), the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra (<http://www.knoxjazz.org/donate>) or Leadership Knoxville (<http://www.leadershipknoxville.com/>)

Tribute Wall

PK

“ My deepest sympathy to Barbara and the family. I had the opportunity to work in the same office as Bill at Suntrust. He was the definition of a gentleman. He was kind beyond words and was truly interested in everyone he met. We had many conversations on a multitude of topics. I have two special memories of Bill. One was that he would always finish the crossword puzzles that I could not and most often in pen. The other was his entrance at work - always whistling and smiling. I am so honored to have known him.

Patti Kelley - February 21, 2021 at 06:56 PM

DB

“ Bill is a major reason that I am in the banking field today, and he taught me that attitude is everything. When choosing teams in this world, Bill was always picked first, regardless of the business, sport or anything in life. We will all miss Bill, but his legacy lives on in hundreds of us! My family's deepest condolences to Barbara and the entire family!

David Bradshaw, Oak Ridge, TN

David R Bradshaw - February 16, 2021 at 10:51 PM

JW

“ When I think of Mr. Arant, (Will always call him that) there are so many memories that I have of him. Yes, he was the father of my best friend, but he was an upstanding man as well. I can see him in the middle of Derbyshire Road talking baseball with my dad well into the night, like it was yesterday. Maybe he and my dad are in heaven right now talking baseball!

I also remember the time that I played him in ping pong in the basement of the Arant house and somehow I got up 3 or 4 to nothing and I started spouting off that I was going to beat him 7-0 (A skunking!). Well, he did not let that happen and proceeded to beat the young whippersnapper. Boy did he let me know about it.

I can remember him playing John Denver, Elton John and Wild Cherry on the basement stereo system as well.

I am not even going to talk about his college team! What was it?

I was always welcome in the Arant house, even when Bill and I were doing something stupid (like taking a candle into a leaf fort!) The Arant family was a key family to the Derbyshire Road family in Winston Salem. It was a sad day when they moved. Now the Arant family is hurting. I hope that you all can hug each other and feel the rest of the Wagstaff family hugging you as well.

Please accept my families' and my sincere condolences about your loss at this very sad time. I wish I could see Mrs. Arant, Jenifer and Bill once again.

John Wagstaff
Wilmington, NC

John Wagstaff - February 15, 2021 at 01:43 PM

LP

“ Dear Barbara,
My deepest condolences to you and your family. Bill was a larger than life person. I'm honored to have worked with him at SunTrust, Capital Bank and First TN and to have called him friend. Loni Peters

Loni Peters - February 14, 2021 at 02:34 PM

BW

“ Dear Mrs. Arant, Jenifer and Bill,

I just heard of Mr. Arant's passing and want to extend my deepest condolences for your loss. My memory of him is as a towering, intimidating giant of a man but also, a man who was very approachable and willing to connect. And the iron-fist handshake is no joke. I still recall our many 2-on-1, 3-on-1 and even 4-on-1 driveway basketball challenges against Mr. Arant - I do not recall him ever turning us down. Similarly, I do not recall ever beating him. Indeed, we feared that some fundamental, global framework would crumble if, by chance, we ever were to win. We always suspected, that as we (the collective neighborhood kids) got older, he was getting nervous about our chances and that's why you moved. Please know that the "Arant house" is still the "Arant house" and will always be the "Arant house".

I'm still working on forgiving him for being a Duke fan - I suppose he needs some flaw.

I wish peace for you and your family and hope you can find solace in your love of each other and in your memories. From what I can tell, he lived a remarkable life and you all were fortunate enough to be a part of that.

*Bob Wagstaff
Roanoke, VA (Winston-Salem, NC)*

Bob Wagstaff - February 13, 2021 at 07:03 PM

TW

“ Knew Bill 40 years. Always a gentleman. Great credibility, friendly smile, community servant. I will miss my friend.

Tim Williams - February 12, 2021 at 09:34 PM

AL

“ Dear Barbara, Jenifer, Bill and family,
Words cannot express my sympathy in your great loss. However, what a legacy of service to community and great relationship connections. The greatest, of course, came through on his love, care & pride in you.
Peace,
Alison

Alison - February 12, 2021 at 09:06 PM

DM

“ I am deeply sorry for you and your family, Barbara. He was a special person for Knoxville.

Diana Morvan

Diana Morgan - February 12, 2021 at 07:47 PM

ST

“ To the Loved Ones of Mr. Arant,

I met Mr Arant only once, when my husband, Ed, worked with him at Capital Bank in Knoxville, TN. Ed admired Mr. Arant tremendously, both professionally and personally. In May of 2020 I was diagnosed with cancer and was referred to the UT Cancer Center. Ed called Mr. Arant and asked him for advise on choosing a care facility and doctor. “Bill Arant knows everyone,” were Ed’s words. Mr. Arant got back to Ed quickly and assured Ed that we were at the best possible place for treatment and working with the best doctors. We were both so appreciative of him taking the time to make the calls and contacting Ed so quickly. I wanted you, his family and friends, to know of our appreciation. You are all in our prayers.

*Sincerely, Sandy Tietjen
Maryville, TN*

Sandra Tietjen - February 12, 2021 at 11:14 AM

ET

“ Barbara and family: Bill was a colleague at Capital Bank who distinguished himself in many ways. To me the most important was his ability to make people around him feel like they were friends, not just business contacts. It was the little touches that made him shine. At lunch he would make a point of learning the names of the wait staff and treat them with kindness and respect. After every business call Bill would return to the office and pen a handwritten thank you note to the person visited, very much a lost art in today's electronic world. During business meetings he made it obvious to the contact that he was genuinely interested in how they were doing and how he might help. In short he was a caring and authentic man. Those who were privileged to know him were rewarded in many ways. He was also well known for his robust handshake. I took to fist bumping with him after my first. Today I mourn his passing and wish well to the family. May he rest in peace. And may Duke win March Madness.

*Ed Tietjen
Maryville, TN*

Ed Tietjen - February 12, 2021 at 09:59 AM

JC

“ We have all lost a true gentleman and an inspirational leader. To see Bill in one of my restaurants was always a pleasure. He was perpetually upbeat and positive, sporting that infectious smile and that crushing handshake. He work with me as first set up our company and the whole experience was first class. My memory of Bill will always be a strong, fit, attractive man all smiles that made you feel better. My prayers are with Barbara and the rest of the family.

*Mike Connor
Knoxville*

J Michael Connor - February 12, 2021 at 09:44 AM

CM

“ My prayers are with the Arant family. I had the privilege of being mentored by Mr. Arant during my time in banking, and he made a lasting and deep impression on me. He helped me to understand the significance of genuine care in professional relationship building and the power of having good manners. He was always quick with a joke or encouraging comment, and he loved to talk about his family (and Duke basketball). His was a life well lived, and he will be greatly missed.

*Chris Miller
Knoxville, TN*

Chris Miller - February 12, 2021 at 08:38 AM

KP

“ Sad to hear of Bill's passing. I knew Bill for over 35 years and he is one of the best examples of a "true leader". He always put other first. Knoxville and the surrounding community benefited from his commitment to charity and business.

Kevin S. Proffitt

Kevin Proffitt - February 12, 2021 at 05:55 AM

HB

“ Bill was a great friend. I first met him (and Barbara) because of Leadership Knoxville. I then served on the board of the Atlanta Federal Reserve's Nashville branch and the board of the Knoxville Jazz Orchestra with him. We had an irregular monthly lunch and shared many stories of banking, basketball and jazz. At his going away from Knoxville dinner, Bill graced us by singing jazz classics in front of a trio. I loved his energy and love of work. I told him when he moved to Maryland's Eastern shore that I would miss him and reiterated that when we talked often on the phone. My deepest condolences to Barbara. We share her grief.

Harold Black

Harold Black - February 11, 2021 at 09:35 PM

JM

“ Barbara and family,
I'm so sorry to hear of Bill's passing. I have many wonderful memories of working with him at SunTrust Bank. He was such a dear man and a friend to many! My deepest sympathy to you all.

Jean "Tino" Martinez (Bill gave me the nickname) <3

Jean Martinez - February 11, 2021 at 03:40 PM

LY

“ Barbara and family,
Please accept Eve and my deepest condolences for the loss of one of the truly great gentlemen. Bill was such a rare person, always armed with a kind word for everyone, and a spirit unmatched for seeing the good in any situation. Bill reminded me to always look on the bright side and to always be ready for a legendary handshake. He will be missed greatly by all those who had the honor of knowing him.

Lawrence Young - February 11, 2021 at 03:26 PM

JT

“ Barbara and Family,
Thank you for sharing this wonderful person with us. Bill was a great mentor and I so appreciate having the ability to have known him. I always smiled when he joined us in the office, whistling his way in and sharing his charisma for everything he did. My heart goes out to you and the family for our loss of this wonderful soul.
Jenny Taylor - Knoxville TN

Jennifer Taylor - February 11, 2021 at 01:32 PM

CG

“ *Barbara and Family,
Please accept my deepest condolences on your loss. I had no idea Mr. Bill was from Manning, SC; that explains his warm and gentle nature. We pass through Manning on our way to Pawleys Island and think it is such a charming place. May God comfort each of you in this difficult time and wrap you with His tender mercies.*

*Fondly,
Carole Galyon*

Carole Galyon - February 11, 2021 at 01:07 PM

MC

“ *Barbara, my heart is broken with this news. What a wonderful friend and counsel he was for me. He certainly played a huge role in the growth of the Knoxville community. My love and prayers to you and the family. Mary Crawford*

Mary Crawford - February 11, 2021 at 12:23 PM

TC

“ *Barbara and family, I am so sad to hear this news but I am so blessed to have gotten to know Bill at Capital Bank and then back at First Tennessee. He is a genuine soul who cares about people. He always made me feel at ease like one does with friends and that he cared about me and my success. I will do my best as I live the rest of my life to treat people the way Bill treated me. God bless you and your family.*

Timothy Coley

Timothy Coley - February 11, 2021 at 11:18 AM

RI

“ *We were shocked and saddened to hear of Bill's passing. Our hearts go out to Barbara and the family at this time of grief and remembrance. We have very fond memories of Bill, particularly his interest in helping people, as when he counseled our daughter Laura when she was considering a career in banking. His love of jazz and mellow voice will ring in our ears, as will his crushing handshake. Goodbye to a wonderful human being, he will be greatly missed.*

Dick and Ann Ince

Richard Ince - February 11, 2021 at 11:02 AM



“ Barb,
What a loss. Bill was a friend-a great friend. He was my mentor as a board member of First Tennessee. His guidance helped me be an active board member and not one who sat passively by and endorsed every thing our CEO proposed.
Dick Ray

Richard Ray - February 11, 2021 at 10:46 AM

DN

“ Jan and I are sad with Bill's passing. He was such a good friend and so kind. We always thought of Bill as true southern gentleman. Always with a gentle spirit and friendly manner. We will truly miss him. Praying for God's peace be with Barbara and the family. David Nagel

David B. Nagel - February 11, 2021 at 10:40 AM

FC

“ Barbara and Family, sorry for your loss. Bill was a good friend and will be missed by many. May he RIP

Frank & Ingrid Culhane

Frank Culhane - February 11, 2021 at 10:20 AM

MI

“ To the family, I am so sorry for your loss. Each of you are in my thoughts and prayers.

Mike - February 11, 2021 at 09:58 AM

DD

“ I knew him in my youth when they visited the Ungers across the street on West Central. Great guy. Condolences To Barbara and family.



Dan(ny) Dobson - February 11, 2021 at 07:51 AM

MS

“ Barbara so sorry for your loss may he rest in peace



Marty dukes smith - February 11, 2021 at 06:57 AM

NF

Barbara,
We are so very sorry to hear of Bill's passing. We will be praying for you all.

Nancy Fitzgerald - February 13, 2021 at 02:55 PM

DW

Barbara, I am sorry for your loss. I met Bill when he was visiting you at your parents at Christmas many years ago. He was very personable.

Donnie Walters

Donnie Walters - February 14, 2021 at 01:09 PM

PE

Dear Barbara, Bill is the only person who ever called me Penny-Lou and the only person who has ever expected me to create a special dessert by presenting me with a box of clothing starch rather than cooking starch! It is the happy memories of your conversations in the dormitory to being in your wedding to sharing my delight when Carl had a chance at our 50th reunion to meet one of my Duke friends. Hugs, Penny

Penny K. Ericson - February 15, 2021 at 11:56 AM

AD

Dear Barbara, Dowe joins me in sending our most sincere condolences on the sad news of Bill's passing. I am heartbroken for you and your family. My memories of our friendship when you first moved to Knoxville remain some of my most cherished. We actually briefly spoke to Bill last year on one of his visits to Knoxville. It was a chance meeting that ended in a good chuckle. I hope he shared our greeting with you. May God hold you in the palm of His hand.

Dowe and Anne Dabbs

Anne Dabbs - February 16, 2021 at 09:08 PM