



*Walter McClarty*

## WALTER J. McCARTHY JR.

1925–2013

Elected in 1984

*“For his outstanding engineering contributions to the electric power industry and his corporate and civic leadership.”*

BY CAREN BYRD

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WALTER JOHN McCARTHY JR., a leader in the US nuclear energy industry and former Detroit Edison chief executive officer, passed away on July 24, 2013, at the age of 88.

Mac, as he was generally called, was born in New York City on April 20, 1925, and grew up in Manhattan. All his life, no matter where he lived, whenever asked where he was from, he proudly responded, “I’m from New York.” He loved the city of his childhood and in retirement took each of his 14 grandchildren to explore his hometown. He would always point to the George Washington Bridge and say, “In my house, that was called ‘the God-damned bridge’ because it replaced my grandfather’s ferries.” He reminisced about his happy childhood summers working on the ferries and believed that it was admiring those ferry engineers that led to both his love of boats and his desire to become an engineer.

He graduated from Cornell University in 1949 with a degree in mechanical engineering and was a member of Pi Tau Sigma, the engineering honorary society. He began his professional life as an engineer at Public Service Electric and Gas Company in Newark, New Jersey, during which he attended the Oak Ridge School of Reactor Technology, where he was mentored and influenced by Admiral Hyman Rickover and Nobel Prize winner Hans Bethe.

Mac quickly distinguished himself in the burgeoning field of nuclear engineering and was chosen in 1952 to head the nuclear and analytic division of the newly formed Enrico Fermi Breeder Reactor Project, a consortium of utilities exploring the potential of nuclear energy. This study led him to Detroit Edison Company (now DTE Energy), where, for the next ten years, he oversaw the development of Fermi I, the nation's first commercial nuclear power plant, which came online in 1963. At this time, Belgium sent over four of its top engineers to learn under Mac and bring nuclear energy technology back to Belgium. Those Belgians became like brothers to Mac and they shared a lifelong friendship. Belgium showed Mac its gratitude for his contribution to the country's development of nuclear energy by bestowing on him its highest honor, the Order of Leopold, of which Mac was extremely proud.

For the next 27 years at Detroit Edison, Mac was a pioneer in the field of nuclear energy. He helped ensure the safe resolution of a partial core meltdown at Fermi I in 1966: no radioactive material was released, and the plant was repaired (it was shut down in 1972). He deftly managed the development of Detroit Edison's Fermi II, which came into commercial operation in 1988 and has been providing reliable and cost-effective power to customers in Southeast Michigan for more than 25 years.

Mac was a lifelong advocate for safe nuclear power and repeatedly testified before Congress on the advantages of nuclear energy. Focused on ensuring operating excellence, not just compliance with regulations, he rose to leadership in the industry and in 1989–1992 chaired the Institute of Nuclear Power Operations (INPO). INPO is a national group of the operators of all nuclear units, formed in response to the Three Mile Island disaster to monitor and improve nuclear operations. Mac used his unparalleled knowledge to respond, adapt, and lead the industry through uncertain times; when a crisis like Chernobyl struck, he was a steady hand. He was instrumental in the formation of the World Association of

Nuclear Operators (WANO), which continues to unite every company and country in the world with an operating commercial nuclear plant to achieve the highest standards of nuclear safety.

From 1981 to 1990 Mac was CEO of Detroit Edison, where his tenure was highlighted by consolidation with the New York branch of the company in 1983; the commercial operation of Fermi II in 1988, his company's largest capital investment ever; and record corporate stock prices in 1989. He was widely respected and is remembered as a loyal manager who knew the names of all of his 10,000 employees.

In addition to his nuclear achievements, Mac was credited with the formation of Midwest Energy Resources Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Detroit Edison, to transport cleaner coal over 1,000 miles from the West to the Midwest by a combination of rail and vessel, with 14,000 tons of coal in each trip. In honor of his retirement from Detroit Edison, a 1,000-foot coal freighter was renamed *The Walter J. McCarthy Jr.* During his last 22 years, the highlight of the summer for Mac and his wife, Linda, was an annual trip on the Great Lakes aboard his namesake, colloquially known by shipmates as the "Big Mac."

Mac was well known in Detroit for his philanthropy and served on numerous boards. He chaired the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) from 1980 to 1987 and, as a passionate champion, fought to keep it going through tough labor battles and economic downturns. One of the highlights of his life was serving as a guest conductor for the DSO. In 1983 Mac initiated the Distinguished Clown Corps, a staple of the Detroit Thanksgiving Day Parade that has raised over \$2 million for the annual celebration.

In 1985 Mac earned the coveted Silver Beaver Award for distinguished service in the Boy Scouts of America, awarded to adult leaders who have made an impact on the lives of youths. With all four sons in the Scouts, his camping days were numerous. Fellow Scout leaders could always count on Mac to be the

first to lead a sing-along around the campfire and to have a backpack heavy with gourmet treats. He was proud that each of his five children achieved high ranks in scouting.

Mac retired to Carmel, California, where he was active in the community and pursued his passion for music by serving as president of the Monterey Symphony. He is survived by his wife Linda; former wife Alice; daughter Sharon; sons Walter, Dave, Jim, and Bill; stepdaughters Carrielynn, Laura, and Lisa; and 14 grandchildren. He will be remembered for his heroic leadership, unwavering integrity, sense of humor, and intellectual curiosity.

