THEODORE C. KENNEDY
1930–2012
Elected in 1999
“For leadership and innovation in advancing the nation’s construction industry.”
BY EARL DOWELL

THEODORE CLIFFORD KENNEDY, an international leader in the construction industry and former CEO and chairman of the board of BE&K, died May 8, 2012, in Birmingham, Alabama, at the age of 81.

Ted was born in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, on May 26, 1930, to Theodore Keith Kennedy and Catherine Gratzer Kennedy. His father was an ironworker with Rust Engineering Company and as a young boy Ted worked alongside his father as “water boy.” Ted attended high school in Front Royal, Virginia, and graduated from Duke University in 1952 with a bachelor of science degree in civil engineering. After graduation, he joined Rust Engineering Company, leaving for two years to serve his country in the US Navy Seabees.

In 1972, he and two colleagues, C. Peter Bolvig and William F. Edmonds, left Rust to form BE&K. They began their business with a simple philosophy—to support their clients, their employees, and their community. In 2008 before being acquired by KBR, Inc., BE&K had become one of the nation’s largest privately held engineering and construction firms.

Under Ted’s leadership, BE&K was recognized as an industry leader promoting Merit Shop construction, which increases employment opportunities as it trains union and independent construction craft workers at the same time. This
method increases the efficiency on the job site and encourages innovative solutions. BE&K was the first construction company to arrange for childcare facilities on construction sites, thus recruiting and training women in the workforce. Its Child Development Center, BEKare, received the NOVA Award in 1991. BE&K was chosen by Fortune magazine as one of the 100 best work places in America. Ted worked with union and non-union employees to increase construction safety, productivity, and ethics throughout the construction industry. BE&K was awarded a STAR safety designation by the US Department of Labor’s Voluntary Protection Program.

Both he (1994) and BE&K have been honored as inductees into the Alabama Engineering Hall of Fame for their outstanding accomplishments in the field of engineering and construction. In 1981 and 1989, Engineering News-Record magazine recognized Ted as a “Man Who Made His Mark,” and again in 1999 they recognized him as “one of the top 125 industry leaders within the past 125 years.”

He served as national president of Associated Builders and Contractors in 1980 and on the Contractor’s Advisory Committee for the Business Roundtable for 14 years, and was chairman of the Construction Industry Institute in 1988.

His honors and awards include Duke University’s Pratt School of Engineering Distinguished Alumnus Award in 1981; the First Crystal Vision Award from the National Association of Women in Construction for his role in the promotion of women in construction; Finnish Decoration of the Knight, First Class, of the Order of the Lion of Finland for his work as the Honorary Consul of Finland in Alabama from 1993 to 2003; the Carroll H. Dunn Award of Excellence by the Construction Industry Institute (1988); the Walter A. Nashert Constructor Award by the American Institute of Constructors; induction into the Alabama Academy of Honor in 2005; Contractor of the Year, Associated Builders and Contractors (1989, 1991); the “Cornerstone Award” by the Associated Builders and Contractors; and Employer of the Year, National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC). He was inducted into the Paper Industry International Hall of Fame in 2008 having been
a member since 1972. The National Academy of Construction established the Ted C. Kennedy Award in 2011 in his honor.

In community affairs, he served on the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham board and as board chair of the Housing Enterprise of Central Alabama. He was also a commissioner with the Housing Authority of the Birmingham District. In education, he served on the Alabama Commission on School Performance and Accountability; as a member of the Board of Directors of the A+ Education Foundation; as chairman of the National Board of Directors for INROADS, Inc., a national career development organization for minority youth; and as chair of the A+ College Ready board, a statewide initiative to establish advanced placement programs in Alabama’s public schools. He was also known for his work with the Children’s Hospital of Alabama and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute.

He was elected a member of the National Academy of Engineering (NAE) in 1999. For the NAE he served as chair and member of the Executive Committee for Section 04 (Civil Engineering), as a member of the Board on Infrastructure and the Built Environment and the Awards Committee as well as on numerous ad hoc National Research Council studies.

Ted was a great leader and ambassador for Duke’s Pratt School of Engineering; his love for Duke and the Pratt School was apparent to all who met him. He had been a member of Duke’s Engineering Dean’s Council and Board of Visitors since 1985, serving as the chair of the board for many years. In 2005, the Theodore C. Kennedy Professorship was established to support engineering faculty in the Pratt School of Engineering.

He was a family man who especially enjoyed family vacations in the Adirondacks, skiing in North Carolina, or time at the beach. He was an avid fly fisherman, trekking to Canada annually for salmon fishing, and one year caught a 40-pound Atlantic salmon.

Ted is survived by four daughters, two sons, and four grandchildren.

Ted understood that it is really all about the excellence of your people; he was a leader and a gentleman that others admired and were grateful to follow.