THOMAS VICTOR FALKIE, a major figure in American mining, passed away peacefully November 1, 2019, in Newtown Square, Pennsylvania. He was 85.

Tom was a wonderful person who touched the lives of everyone he met with his warm personality and enduring friendship. His professional career of more than six decades in US mining is a unique story of demonstrated and sustained excellence in service to industry, academia, government, and professional societies.

Tom was born September 5, 1934, in Mt. Carmel, Pennsylvania, to Victor and Aldona Falkie, coal miner and factory worker, respectively. As Tom tells the story, “my father had an eighth-grade education and he wanted more for me,” and his mother told him frequently “you are not going to work in the mines.”

Tom’s ticket out of the fading anthracite mining area was a scholarship from Reading Anthracite Company with which he entered Pennsylvania State University, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in 1956 and then, with a fellowship from the International Minerals and Chemicals Corporation, a master’s (1958) and PhD (1961), all in mining engineering.

Upon graduation he went to work for International Mining Consultants as an operations research engineer in Skokie, Illinois. He quickly rose to become chief of operations planning,
manager of special exploration and development projects, and then production control manager and production superintendent in Bartow, Florida.

He maintained an active interest in academia by teaching courses in industrial engineering as an adjunct professor at the University of South Florida and serving as a member of the Industrial Advisory Committee to the College of Engineering at the University of Florida. He returned to Penn State in 1969 to head the newly organized Department of Mineral Engineering, expanding the scope of teaching and research activities into management and environmental conservation.

In 1973 President Richard M. Nixon nominated Tom to serve as director of the US Bureau of Mines. In this position he was a forceful spokesman for the nation’s mineral and energy interests during the first energy crisis and oversaw the federal government’s research and development programs for coal and mineral production and safety.

In 1977, at the end of the Ford administration, Tom joined Berwind Natural Resources Corporation, a Philadelphia-based company operating nationwide with interests in coal, natural gas, and mineral lands. He remained with Berwind until 2003, serving as president and chief executive officer (1977–98), chair of the board (1998–2003), and then on the board of directors until 2010.

Besides his primary work, Tom was active in several mining organizations, always striving for the advancement of the mining profession. In 1973 he served as the national arbitrator (neutral chair) of the Joint Industry Health and Safety Committee of the United Mine Workers of America and Bituminous Coal Operators Association, an indication of the acceptance of Tom’s leadership by workers and management alike. He was president of the Society of Mining, Metallurgy and Exploration (SME; 1985), American Institute of Mining, Metallurgy and Petroleum Engineers (AIME; 1988), and Joseph A. Holmes Safety Association (1974–77). He also had major leadership roles in government and educational efforts of the American Mining Congress, National Coal Association, National Mining Association, and SME Foundation; and he

Tom knew from his personal experience that education is the key to success and that financial support is essential for deserving students to go to school. In addition to his substantial personal and corporate commitments to scholarships, he devoted quality time to providing advice and counsel to mining programs and to fundraising activities for universities and professional mining societies. He was one of the founding members of the SME Coal Division Scholarship Endowment Fund, established in the mid-1970s to support US mining and mineral-related programs. He chaired Penn State’s College of Earth and Mineral Sciences Grand Destiny Campaign (1996–2000) to raise funds for earth science and engineering-related programs. And in 1999 he and his wife established the Thomas V. and Jean C. Falkie Faculty Fellowship in Mining Engineering at Penn State.

The breadth and depth of Tom’s knowledge on diverse mineral-related issues, his ability to see all points of view, and his untiring efforts to seek consensus solutions were in constant demand for advisory panels on complex problems. As a member of expert panels of the National Research Council on minerals and energy resources (1982–88), energy (2001), and mining technology (2002); United Nations on mining economics and environment (1971–73); US government (1974–76); and Department of the Interior advisory committee of the Mining and Mineral Resources Research Institutes (1988–94), Tom made substantial contributions to national mineral and energy policy, mineral research and development, and environmental planning in mining.

He was also active in service to the NAE, with terms on the Bylaw Review Committee, Council, Audit Committee, Earth Resources Engineering Peer Committee (including as vice chair and chair), and Finance Committee.

Tom was the first PhD recipient in the United States in the field of operations research/management science applications
in mining engineering and was a pioneer in recognizing the potential of computers for planning, designing, and managing mineral industry operations. And his contributions to the mineral industry extend to disciplines from pure science to engineering, technology, management, education, and policymaking. He authored over 200 publications, lectures, and speeches in these areas and contributed to several handbooks on mining engineering.

The excellence and long-lasting impact of Tom’s contributions to the science, engineering, and societal aspects of mining were widely acknowledged. Among the significant recognitions conferred by his peers, several are the highest in their categories: distinguished member of SME (1978), member of the NAE (1989), honorary member of AIME (1996), distinguished alumnus of the Pennsylvania State University (2004), and Mining Hall of Fame (2017). He was also the 1978 Henry Krumb Lecturer of AIME and the 1988 Distinguished Lecturer of the Australasian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy.

In addition, he was selected for prestigious awards from professional societies. He received in 1991 the AIME Erskine Ramsay Medal for “his notable achievements in coal mining resulting from his successful bridging of these three realms of activity: academics, government, and industry, and distinguishing himself in all of them”; in 2015 the AIME Charles F. Rand Memorial Gold Medal, for “outstanding contributions to the minerals community and profession through distinguished service in industry, academia, government and professional societies”; and in 2018 the Mining and Metallurgical Society of America Gold Medal “in recognition of a lifetime of contributions to the mining industry through education, industry management, and government service.”

Lest anyone think Tom was all work and no play, the truth was quite the opposite. He enjoyed golf, fishing, poker, and traveling around the United States and the world. Foremost he was a family man, always taking his wife and kids fishing at lakes, streams, rivers, and beaches, and in boats of all types. Fishing outings were supplemented by picnics featuring his wife Jean’s fabulous culinary talents and then feasts of the
fresh catch. Golf, poker, and ski trips were a way to spend time with friends, family, and colleagues. And for nearly 30 years he delighted in hosting an annual reunion picnic, with scores of family and friends enjoying a weekend of swimming, touch football, soccer, barbecue, and of course pierogis and kielbasa.

Tom was predeceased in 2001 by Jean Cecilia (née Broschius), his constant companion and inspiration. They are survived by their children Ann Marie, Tom Jr., Larry, Michael, and Christine Mack (John), and four grandchildren.

Tom was a humble man who will be missed by all—from his children and extended family members to his friends in the golf, skiing, poker, and other groups that he enjoyed. The many species of fish he pursued can take a breather, as can the friendly golfers competing for closest to the pin and the boys calculating the odds of the next card.