



## Frank Batten, Sr. dies at 82

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NORFOLK, Va. (AP) - Frank Batten Sr., who built a communications empire that spanned newspapers and cable television and created The Weather Channel, died Thursday. He was 82.

Batten was the retired chairman of privately held Landmark Communications and a former chairman of the board of The Associated Press.

Batten died in Norfolk, Va., after a prolonged illness, Landmark Vice Chairman Richard F. Barry III said.

Batten was a visionary executive who earned a reputation for spotting media trends and was in the forefront of development of cable television in the 1960s.

He developed The Weather Channel in the 1980s while other media leaders scoffed. In 2008, Landmark sold the channel to NBC Universal and two private equity firms for \$3.5 billion.

The company had put its other businesses up for sale but suspended those plans amid the faltering economic conditions.

With a fortune estimated at \$2.3 billion, Batten ranked 190th on Forbes magazine's 2008 list of the 400 richest Americans.

"I think that most accomplishments in organizations are officially the result of teamwork rather than a brilliant performance by one person," Batten said in a 2005 Associated Press oral history interview.

"Accomplishing teamwork is another matter," he added. "That's not easy, I think. And again it gets down to creating an environment in which people work successfully in teams, and are recognized for it."

He served as AP board chairman from 1982-87.

Retired AP president and chief executive officer Louis D. Boccardi said Batten "came into AP's life at a critical time and started us on the road to modernize our systems, our management, and indeed our thinking while keeping true to our journalistic heritage."

Batten's uncle, Samuel L. Slover, had sowed the seeds of Norfolk-based Landmark in the early 1900s by acquiring a succession of local newspapers.

Slover helped raise Batten after Batten's father died when he was 1. Batten began his career as a reporter and advertising salesman for the Norfolk newspapers.

In 1954, the 27-year-old Batten was appointed publisher of the now-defunct Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch and The Virginian-Pilot. The company consisted of the two newspapers and a radio and TV station.

In the late 1950s, when Norfolk closed its schools rather than integrate them, Batten and other community leaders ran a full-page newspaper advertisement urging city officials to reopen them. Virginian-Pilot editor Lenoir Chambers won a Pulitzer Prize in 1960 for a series of editorials on the situation.

For a few years, Batten mentored current Virginian-Pilot Publisher Maurice Jones.

Jones said Batten stressed, "Always be ethical, always admit mistakes -- those types of core values that were timeless and that you always adhered to no matter what business you were in."

"You really can not overstate Batten and his family. Perhaps the greatest Norfolk citizen of all time. I don't know we'll ever be able to truly say how much he meant to us," Mayor Fraim told WAVY.com.

Tidewater Community College President Deborah DiCroce said Batten allowed TCC to make history by funding a fellowship that led to the discovery of new technology that TCC now owns.

"[He was] a bottom line visionary who got the multiple... benefits of education for the public good," said DiCroce.

Slover died in 1959, and in 1964 Batten launched TeleCable and expanded in North Carolina and West Virginia with the first of 20 cable television systems in 15 states. TeleCable was sold to Tele-Communications Inc. in 1995 for \$1 billion.

Meanwhile, Norfolk Newspapers Inc. became Landmark Communications Inc. in 1967, and Batten became chairman. He turned over that position to his son, Frank Batten Jr., in 1998.

Landmark now owns three metro daily newspapers -- The Virginian-Pilot, the News & Record in Greensboro, N.C., and The Roanoke Times -- plus more than 50 smaller community papers, free newspapers and specialty classified publications. It also owns television stations KLAS-TV in Las Vegas and NewsChannel 5 Network in Nashville, both CBS affiliates.

But Batten was always especially proud of The Weather Channel, launched in 1982.

"It was Landmark's first national venture, with all the complexities of marketing and distribution a national enterprise must consider," he said. "The staff prevailed over a chorus from skeptics in the press and trade to build one of the most loyal consumer audiences in television."

In 2009, Batten received the Virginia Press Association Lifetime Achievement Award.

Over the years, Batten donated more than \$223 million to schools and other educational organizations. They included a 2007 gift of \$100 million to his alma mater, the University of Virginia, to establish the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy and a \$60 million gift in 1999 to the university's Darden Graduate School of Business Administration.

Batten had cancer that required removal of his larynx in 1979. The surgery forced him to learn a new way of speaking that left his voice gravelly,

but it didn't keep him from working and speaking in public.

Sandra Mims Rowe, editor of The Oregonian who worked on The Virginian-Pilot, Landmark's flagship newspaper, from 1970 to 1993, recalled the first Landmark annual meeting after the surgery. Rowe said Batten began the meeting as always, by introducing every executive without notes, and didn't miss a name or title.

"Everyone cheered but some of us wept," Rowe said. "It took a long time to go through 80 people, and you knew he was doing it to show us he was OK and to really give us confidence. It was the most courageous, generous and inspirational thing I ever saw."

Batten earned his undergraduate degree from the University of Virginia in 1950 and a master's degree in business administration from Harvard University two years later. He served in the Merchant Marine during World War II and later as a Navy reserve officer.

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