

# Scottsdale will celebrate life of its 'Mr. Prestige,' Don Frye

By Lois McFarland

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A lover of people, not only family and friends but employees of Prestige Cleaners, Scottsdale's most successful dry-cleaning business, Don Frye left behind a compassionate legacy for living that will be difficult to match.

"Mr. Prestige" died Nov. 25. He was 95. A celebration of life will be Jan. 6. Contact the corporate office of Prestige Cleaners at 480-948-2781 for information.

"Every community has its lions," said Rick Kidder, president and CEO of the Scottsdale Area Chamber of Commerce. "Some of them roar, and some of them thoughtfully lead the pack. Don Frye was that quiet lion, the one on whom everyone in Scottsdale could count.

"He was a businessman, a community man and a man who saw his responsibility as giving back to help make Scottsdale great. A chamber member since 1964, Don stood strongly and quietly at the center of every effort to make Scottsdale a wonderful place to live and work."

Said former Mayor Sam Campana:

"Don was such a generous citizen of Scottsdale. No matter the question, the answer was always 'Yes!' Scottsdale is a far better community because of the years Don volunteered to help on task forces, committees and in the chamber."

Frye started the dry-cleaning business about the same time as Paul Messinger began Messinger Mortuaries.

"We watched each other grow with the community, and his positive attitude always had a great influence on me," Messinger said. "He quietly helped and gave to many people that no one knew about. Don was a special guy and will be greatly missed."

Frye never forgot his humble beginnings. The early years were not easy. His mother died when he was 3½ and he and his brother, Bill, just a year old, went to live with grandparents in Wellston, Ohio. The home had no running water, no electricity and was heated by soft coal burned in a pot-belly stove. Their staples were beans, potatoes and maybe meat on Sunday.

In 1936, while coping with the Great

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Don Frye retired in 1981, turning the day-to-day operations of Prestige Cleaners over to son Donn (right), CEO and president. They are shown in 2004. THE REPUBLIC

## FRYE

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Depression, he moved to Columbus, Ohio, and worked as a busboy at the Chittenden Hotel, earning \$60 a month. It was during his stint on the room-service crew that he met the president of the largest dry-cleaning plant in Columbus. The man offered him a job as a route salesman at \$25 a week. That was the beginning of his career building environmentally safe dry-cleaning plants which have been recognized as industry leaders.

Except for his service in the U.S. Merchant Marine during World War II, he spent more than 60 years in the dry-cleaning business. In 1956, while still in Ohio, a new plant he designed won him recognition from the *American Dry-cleaner* magazine.

In 1946, Frye married Marjorie "Mickey" Pierson. They had two sons, Michael and Donn. Because Michael suffered from a serious heart condition, the family moved in 1962 from Ohio to Scottsdale's dryer climate.

The first Prestige Cleaners opened June 1, 1964 at Camelback and Scottsdale roads, where the Scottsdale Waterfront now stands. Since that time, the number of award-winning cleaners has reached eight.

Along with his success in business, Frye faced personal losses. In 1979, Michael suffered cardiac arrest. In 1981, Mickey died. In 1983, he married long-time friend Edith "Edie" Buescher. Both

couples had been friends before the death of their spouses. He retired in 1981, turning the day-to-day operation over to son, Donn Frye, CEO and president, who has carried on with extensive service to Scottsdale and its non-profit community.

Known for his love of dancing and the big-band sounds of Benny Goodman, Tommy and Jimmy Dorsey, Glenn Miller and his "good friend" Les Brown, he once said: "I don't play anything. My claim to fame is I've danced from the Rainbow Room in New York to the Palladium in Hollywood."

"He was a big supporter of Jazz in AZ, and the 'jazz room' in his home was filled with memorabilia and photos with many world-renowned jazz musicians," said Patricia Myers, Jazz in AZ founder, author and historian. "He was the epitome of a dapper gentleman, always seen in a freshly pressed shirt and trousers befitting his career in the dry-cleaning industry."

Dedicated to enriching the lives of others through music, he founded the Al Grey Memorial Trombone Scholarship at Mesa Community College to honor his friend Grey, a trombonist who played with the Count Basie Orchestra and worked with Frank Sinatra, Tony Bennett and Ella Fitzgerald.

Civic leader and former City Council member Jim Bruner said: "... His wonderful smile and enthusiasm for Scottsdale will be missed."

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