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Wednesday, December 8, 2004

**Jay Van Andel, 1924-2004**

## Amway founder Van Andel dies

The Grand Rapids philanthropist, 80, was a champion of conservative causes.

By Louis Aguilar / The Detroit News

Jay Van Andel, the Grand Rapids native who co-founded Amway Corp., championed conservative political causes and reshaped his hometown with his philanthropy, died Tuesday at his home.

Van Andel was 80. He had Parkinson's disease but apparently died of heart failure, according to Amway officials.

"This is a day of sadness but also a day of counting your blessings," Richard DeVos, co-founder of Amway, said during a news conference at Amway's parent company, Alticor Inc.

Van Andel and DeVos founded Amway in 1959 in their basements. Amway now operates in more than 80 countries and territories, with 13,000 employees and millions of distributors. Alticor reported sales of \$6.2 billion for the year ending Aug. 31.

Van Andel lived with an unabashed zeal for free enterprise and his Christian faith that led him to a vast personal fortune and influence that stretches far beyond his native Grand Rapids.

His estimated net worth of \$2.3 billion in 2004 earned him the rank of 231st richest man in the world by Forbes magazine.

Van Andel poured millions into Grand Rapids, helping his hometown build the Amway Grand Plaza Hotel, Van Andel Arena, the Van Andel Museum Center and the Van Andel Research Institute.

His donation to conservative causes and the Republican Party also amounted to millions. Van Andel was never as personally active in politics as DeVos, who at one point was the finance chairman of the Republican National Committee. Nevertheless, Van Andel was a major behind-the-scenes political presence.

The Van Andel and DeVos families gave a combined \$95 million to the GOP between 1990 and 1998, according to the Associated



Van Andel

### James Van Andel

**Age:** 80

**Birthplace:** Grand Rapids

**Education:** Graduated from Grand Rapids Christian High School in 1942. Attended Calvin College, Grand Rapids; Morningside College, Sioux City, Iowa; Pratt Business School, Kansas; and Yale University Aviation Cadet School.

**Military experience:**

Served as a first lieutenant in the Army Air Corps from 1942-45.

**Career:** Co-founded Amway Corp. in 1959 with Richard DeVos, a distributor of personal care and home products. Parent company Alticor Inc. worldwide sales of \$6.2 billion for year ending Aug. 2004

**Personal net worth:** \$2.3 billion

**Family:** Survived by four children and 10 grandchildren

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Press.  
 "Obviously, we were very close to him," said DeVos' daughter-in-law, state GOP chair Betsy DeVos. "He's going to be sorely missed."

**Amway through the decades**

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Even Democrats joined in praising Van Andel for his impact on Michigan business and on community projects in Grand Rapids. Gov Jennifer Granholm said he was "deeply committed to putting his success to work for others and to his community.

"He worked to put Michigan on the Life Sciences map and invigorated his hometown of Grand Rapids through his tremendous philanthropy."

The multibillion-dollar enterprise called Amway grew out of Van Andel's early knack for salesmanship.

The 15-year-old Van Andel offered classmate DeVos a daily ride to Grand Rapids Christian High School in his Model A Ford in exchange for 25 cents a week in gas money.

Returning to Grand Rapids after World War II, Van Andel and DeVos tried their hands at several businesses.

The first was a flying school that had one airplane, a Piper Cub fitted with pontoons to use the Grand River for takeoffs and landings while the runways at the airfield they were building were under construction. They later opened Grand Rapids' first drive-in restaurant.

Van Andel and DeVos ventured into person-to-person sales in 1949, forming the Ja-Ri Corp. and selling vitamins and food supplements. They founded Amway in 1959, operating out of the basements of their neighboring homes and selling a single product, a biodegradable household cleaner called L.O.C.

"Jay Van Andel was the great friend of my lifetime. I will miss him dearly," Richard DeVos said in a statement Tuesday. "His tremendous acumen and vision helped build our business into a great engine of freedom and opportunity for millions around the world. He was a brilliant example of the fulfilled promise of America and free enterprise."

Despite its success, Amway has never been able to completely shed the controversy that has dogged the direct sales business for decades now. Amway has faced a string of allegations made by academics, former Amway distributors and journalists that the company is a pyramid scheme with traits similar to those of a cult. The Federal Trade Commission charged in 1969 that the the Ada-based company was an illegal pyramid because of its practice of having Amway distributors recruit other potential distributors. But after a six-year investigation, Amway was exonerated.

He is survived by four children and 10 grandchildren.

Son Steve Van Andel is Alticor's chairman and manages the company's daily operations. Public viewings will be today and Thursday, followed by a funeral Friday in Grand Rapids.

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