

Finnell, William Sherman 1925 - 2008

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William Sherman Finnell Jr.

COOKEVILLE -- Funeral services for Dr. William Sherman Finnell Jr., will be held Saturday, Dec. 13, at 10 a.m. from the chapel of Crest Lawn Funeral Home.

Burial will be in Veterans Memorial Gardens of Crest Lawn Memorial Cemetery.

Family will receive friends Friday, Dec. 12, from 4-7 p.m. at the funeral home.

Dr. Finnell was born May 25, 1925, in Fayette County, Ky., to the late William Sherman and Gertrude Sears Finnell, and grew up in that area. Dr. Finnell left high school in 1943 to begin pilot training in the Army Air Force and thus began his adult life that included a variety of careers in service to his God, his family, his country and his community.

After two years of military service, he returned to Lexington, Ky, to resume a career with the Lexington-Herald Leader newspaper. In the mid-1950s, he joined the staff of his home church, Grace Baptist Church, as minister of education while earning a baccalaureate degree from Georgetown College in Kentucky. During the years ahead he would become one of those high school drop-outs who over-compensated in the education field, earning a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees and a doctorate degree in education.

Upon graduation from Georgetown, he moved to Dallas, Texas, and served on the staff of Ross Avenue Baptist Church while completing a master's degree from Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. After serving on church staffs at First Baptist Church in Vicksburg, Miss., Calvary Baptist Church in Tupelo, Miss., and Daniel Memorial Baptist Church in Jackson, Miss., he began work on a doctor's degree at the University of Memphis.

Completing his doctorate in 1972, he accepted a position of Associate Dean of Student Services and Assistant Professor of Higher Education at Tennessee Tech, beginning his productive years of service to the Cookeville area. Several noteworthy programs were created at Tech under his direction, including the installation of an Omicron Delta Kappa (ODK) Honor Society, a student-led freshman orientation plan and an academic course in the College of Education on "Leadership." Dr. Finnell spent many hours guiding his students as they developed leadership skills in preparation for their years in industry and public service.

In 1982, Dr. Finnell switched his career goals to the financial world and built a small financial services practice in Cookeville from an initial \$260,000 to \$31 million, guiding his clients in securing their financial future. His work earned him many honors and awards.

Dr. Finnell was widely published in secular and religious periodicals and journals. He is listed in "Leaders of Education" (5th edition) and "Who's Who in the South and Southwest" (16th edition).

During his years in Cookeville, Dr. Finnell was a member of First Baptist Church, American Legion, Cookeville Noonday Rotary Club, a past member of the Putnam Board of Directors of the American Cancer Society and served as Tennessee Director of US TOO! International Prostate Cancer Education and Support Organization. US TOO! works with prostate cancer survivors, their spouses and families as they wend their way through the treatments and ravages, the ups and downs of the disease, which Dr. Finnell fought from 1991 until his death. His work with US TOO! was honored in 2005 by the inauguration of the William S. Finnell Award to be given annually to the person or group whose work is deemed most valuable during the year for aiding in education about prostate cancer and in the support of patients and their families who are afflicted.

His own family, however, was his highest concern and he loved them second only to his love of God. His love for his family was always evident, and his insatiable curiosity covered a wide range of topics pertinent to his children and grandchildren. He never lost his love of learning, and a family gathering always included conversations with him regarding anything from politics to how cell phones work, always providing an engaging evening. He inspired his children and grandchildren to think for themselves and to learn everything they could about the world around them, believing that an active, engaged mind is the basis for wisdom and happiness.

His family includes a daughter and son-in-law, JoAnne and Art Peters of Dayton, Ohio; a son and daughter-in-law, Dr. David and Linda Finnell; two stepsons and daughters-in-law, Barry and Sandra Spearman of Monterey and David and Jeannette Spearman of Tupelo, Miss.; five grandchildren, Shane Finnell and wife Angela of Batesburg, S.C., Nathan Finnell and wife Mindy of Columbia, S.C., Amber Spencer, Blake Spearman and wife Suzanne and Christina Spearman, all of Tupelo; a brother and sister-in-law, Logan and Joann Finnell; a sister, Nancy Oliver of Lexington; two nephews, Ron Oliver and wife Cheri of Tarpon Springs, Fla., and Timothy Finnell and wife Ophelia of Lexington; three nieces, Rosanne Smith and husband Mark and Lisa Finnell, all of Lexington, and Linda Dunaway and husband Bobby of Wilmore, Ky.; and several great-grandchildren.

In addition to his parents, Dr. Finnell was preceded in death by two brothers, Wesley Finnell of Lexington and Julian Finnell of Louisville, Ky., and his beloved wife, Sara.

Pastor Randy Adkisson and Bro. Charlie Hutchinson of Cookeville First Baptist will officiate at the services.