

Former Freedom CEO Rosse dies

He came to lead the Register's parent from an economics professorship at Stanford.

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James N. "Jim" Rosse, former president and chief executive of Freedom Communications Inc., the Irvine-based parent company of The Orange County Register, died Monday after a long illness. He was 72.

Although he headed the company for just seven years -- from 1992 to 1999 -- that was plenty of time for the bright, scholarly and funny former Stanford University professor to leave both a professional and personal mark on the company and his colleagues.

Best-known as both an agent of change and a custodian of Freedom's libertarian heritage, he is credited with positioning Freedom to deal with the explosive, technology-driven changes of the media industry during the '90s, while accelerating the company's growth and diversification.

His vision helped Freedom's broadcast division grow from five television stations to eight and its newspaper division to increase by four daily papers.

In addition, he worked hard to carry on the legacy of Freedom's founder, the late R.C. Hoiles. **Rosse** initiated Founder's Day, made sure employees throughout the company appreciated Hoiles and his legacy, and talked constantly about the five Freedom values: respect for individual freedom, self-respect, integrity, community and lifelong learning.

To help Hoiles family shareholders appreciate and love their family business, he started a shareholder-relations program to make sure the business would last a long time and bring in a fourth generation of family members to carry on the company values. He also added non-family members to the board.

The result was a strong professionalization of the family business.

"He was an extraordinary man," said current Freedom CEO Alan Bell, "a big man, a memorable man whose death leaves us poorer for the loss."

Register Publisher N. Christian Anderson III called **Rosse** "a breakthrough CEO for Freedom because he essentially re shaped the company from the standpoint of being willing to try an incredible number of new things. The first thing that pops into my mind is that he was incredibly smart. Everything about him was growing the company."

A native of Sidney, Neb., **Rosse** was a farm boy who never forgot his roots. He loved to lecture colleagues on how pigs got a bad rap for being dirty, which they are not.

He spent a year at Yale University and then graduated from the University of Minnesota, where he earned a doctorate in economics and mathematics.

He spent 26 years at Stanford University, where he was hired as an economics professor. He also held the positions of associate dean of humanities and sciences and director of the Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research.

In 1984, he was named provost, the top administrative officer, at Stanford, where he established a successful news paper-consulting practice, specializing in newspaper antitrust litigation.

"Not to have known Jim was to have missed an experience," Bell said. "Those who have joined Freedom since he retired have all heard their share of Jim stories -- all of them true."

Bell ought to know.

Rosse was a fan of computers dating back to the days of DOS and was frustrated by Bell's refusal to use one. Finally, **Rosse** took matters into his own hands, and while Bell was gone, outfitted his office with a new Macintosh.

Rosse crouched outside an office window to see Bell's reaction when he found the new computer setup, complete with Bell's photo as a screen saver.

Bell, now a computer convert, admits that Freedom "needed a kick in the pants in terms of training its people to come to terms with the Internet" and that "(he) brought us into the computer age."

Indeed. He knew everything about them and had a roomful of them -- and his own server -- in his Irvine home.

When he first came to Freedom, someone told him, "I have your computer all picked out."

"Oh, NO you don't," responded **Rosse**. He then politely outlined precisely what he wanted.

Employees loved **Rosse**. He was rather like one's favorite professor -- wise, witty and a bit ruffled around the edges. He never got angry or addled and didn't let things upset him.

Although he was known around the world for his expertise in media economics and served often as an expert witness in newspaper-litigation cases, he was highly irreverent about his own status.

Casual and down-to-earth, he had little use for ostentation, although he did drive a gold, 500-series Mercedes.

At the same time, he had a ferocious will, and when he wanted something done his way, it usually was.

He was highly organized and detail-oriented, to the point of insisting on a specific font type, Stone Informal, on his computer.

Tall and round-faced with a warm grin and eyes that sparkled when he was excited, which was much of the time, **Rosse**, who wore both belt and suspenders, was known as the belt-and-suspenders economist for the extra care he took with everything he did.

Once at a meeting, he said something to the group about an economic theorem, the mere mention of which set his eyes ablaze with interest. "And," he added enthusiastically, happily oblivious to the lack of zeal surrounding him, "I have a copy for all of you!"

He is survived by his wife, Jan, three children and three grandchildren.

Services are pending.

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Rosse is credited with positioning Freedom to deal with technological changes of '90s media industry.