

Frank G. Binswanger Jr., 94, real estate exec, civic leader

By Gary Miles
STAFF WRITER

Frank G. Binswanger Jr., 94, of Philadelphia, longtime corporate real estate executive and chairman emeritus of the Binswanger company, civic leader, and philanthropist, died Wednesday, July 6, of failure to thrive at his home in Margate, N.J.

The son of Frank G. Binswanger, founder of the Philadelphia-based multinational real estate brokerage and services company, Mr. Binswanger served as vice president, president, and chairman during his 60-plus years with the firm. A skilled negotiator and intuitive executive, he completed significant real estate deals in the United States and around the world with corporate giants such as Motorola, Intel, Amgen, Kohler, Caterpillar, and IBM.

Recognizing that corporate real estate transactions in the 1950s and '60s were shifting from the Northeastern United States to the Southeast and elsewhere, he oversaw the opening of the company's Southern division in Charlotte, N.C., in 1956 and went on to establish offices across the nation and in 25 other countries.

He was instrumental in the creation of Philadelphia's Northeast Industrial Park in the 1960s and announced in 1984 that the company would expand to include high-end Center City residences. "We're strictly going for the top of the market," he told *The Inquirer*.

Mr. Binswanger was aggressive and demanding in his professional life. His advice to other real estate executives was: "Do not accept mediocrity." He told *The Inquirer* in 1984: "We've been successful at everything we have gone into. There's only one way to play the game — to win. Second is no fun."

He passed that conviction on to his children and grandchildren, and his grandson Zach, president of Binswanger International, said: "Pop always said that, whether in life or business, you won't get anything unless you ask. And if you hear 'no,' ask again. And again."

Mr. Binswanger was a booster of both Philadelphia and Margate, where he had a second home, and wrote an opinion piece for *The Inquirer* in 1988 in which he detailed suggestions on how his hometown could expand its industrial base. "Philadelphia has what it takes to maintain a healthy economy with balanced growth in both the manufacturing and service sectors," he said.



Frank Binswanger and his wife, Suzanne, met in high school. "We had the most wonderful 72 years together," she said.

"Let's do what has to be done to ensure that growth."

In 1984 in Margate, he initiated a deal that turned an abandoned site into popular luxury townhouses. He "didn't even care if we turned a profit," salesman John P. Studnicki told *The Inquirer*. "He just wanted to get this eyesore developed with a project that Margate could be proud of."

Mr. Binswanger served on the boards of the Fox Chase Cancer Center, Chief Executives Organization, and Philadelphia Hospitality Inc. He was Philadelphia chapter chair of the Young Presidents' Organization, a member of the Society of Industrial and Office Realtors, and trustee emeritus at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn.

He and his brother John established the Binswanger Prize for Excellence in Teaching at Wesleyan to honor their father, and Wesleyan president Michael S. Roth said in an online tribute: "Teaching, learning, philanthropy — Binswanger traditions."

Born March 14, 1928, Mr. Binswanger grew up in Elkins Park, graduated from Deerfield Academy in Massachusetts, and was a member of the 1948 undefeated football team at Wesleyan. He graduated in 1950 and served in the Army from 1951 to 1953.

He met Suzanne Hirsch in high school. They married in 1950, had daughters Eve and Jody, and son Jeff, and lived in Elkins Park, Jenkintown, and Society Hill. "We had the most wonderful 72 years together," his wife said.

The couple, along with his brother John and his wife, Louise, won the 1993 Marriage Council of Philadelphia Award for

"outstanding leadership and civic contributions to the Greater Philadelphia region." His daughter Jody Snider said: "He loved Philadelphia."

A natural entertainer, Mr. Binswanger liked to dance and dress in elaborate costumes for big events. He organized Thanksgiving Day family reunions and gave emotional speeches at dinner.

He played drums and relaxed to the music of Lou Rawls, Grover Washington Jr., and Frank Sinatra. He read mysteries and thrillers, and followed the Eagles, Flyers, and other local sports teams.

"Frank was a wonderful man," a friend said in an online tribute. "Always smiling and friendly."

Close to his grandfather, Mr. Binswanger doted on his grandchildren and hosted them on several safari trips to Africa. "If you ask any of his grandchildren, each would probably say they were his favorite," grandson Jonathan Snider said. "That is how he made each of us feel."

His daughter Jody said: "He was unbelievably kind to others and lived life to its fullest."

In addition to his wife, children, brother, and two grandsons, Mr. Binswanger is survived by four other grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and other relatives. A brother, Robert, died earlier.

A celebration of his life is to be held later.

Donations in his name may be made to Deerfield Academy, P.O. Box 306, Deerfield, Mass. 01342, and Wesleyan University, 45 Wyllys Ave., Middletown, Conn. 06459.

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