Charles R. “Dick” Webb, 70, of Pittsburg, Kansas, died, Monday, March 23, 2009, at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas surrounded by his family. He was the founder and chairman of Watco Companies, Inc., a rail service provider in Pittsburg, Kansas.

Starting from his kitchen table in 1983 with eight employees, Dick worked with members of the Watco Team to grow the business while keeping his focus on meeting the needs of the folks who paid the bills, the Customers. At the time of his death he had led the company to operate 3,900 miles of track, 22 short line railroads, 22 switching locations, 14 mechanical shops, 18 mobile mechanical repair locations, and eleven trans load and intermodal locations. Watco is a privately held company that operates in 26 states and has a team of 2,000 people.

He was born on December 10, 1938, in Independence, Kansas to Jesse and Grace Lewis Webb. They both preceded him in death.

He attended Horace Mann Elementary School, Lakeside Junior High and graduated from Pittsburg High School in 1956. He graduated from Kansas State Teachers College in Pittsburg (now Pittsburg State University) in 1962 with a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration. He was a member of the Kansas Army National Guard from 1956-1965, where he achieved the rank of First Sergeant.

He received many awards and recognitions in his life. He was named Distinguished Alumni from Pittsburg High School in 2003, and received the Meritorious Achievement Award from Pittsburg State University in May 2006. He also received many awards and recognitions from his contributions and work on behalf of many communities across the United States.

On behalf of Watco, he received the Governors Award of Excellence for a Kansas Business, from Gov. Kathleen Sebelius, in 2005. It is the highest honor Kansas bestows on a Kansas business. Mr. Webb married Kaye Lynne Johnson in Miami, Oklahoma on April 6, 1957. She survives of the home. They have two children Susan K. Lundy and Richard B. Webb, both of Pittsburg. Other survivors include his son-in-law, Gary Lundy of Pittsburg; his daughter-in-law, Stacey Webb, of Pittsburg; and six grand children: Kaleigh Ann Lundy, of Los Angeles, CA; Afton Leigh Lundy, Fallyne Marie Lundy, Cameron Richard Webb “Bubba” Lundy, Megan Lynne Webb, and Jacob Bruce Webb all of Pittsburg.

He was preceded in death by two brothers Jack Lewis Webb, and James Robert Webb.

Mass of Christian burial will be 10:00 a.m. Friday (March 27) at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and will be co-celebrated by Fr. Robert McElwee and Fr. Thomas Stroot. Burial will follow in the Highland Park Cemetery. Friends may call at the Brenner Mortuary from 9:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. and after 5:30 p.m. at the church on Thursday. The parish rosary will be recited at 6:00 p.m. Thursday at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, where the family will receive friends following the rosary until 8:00 p.m. There will then be a celebration of life for Mr. Webb afterwards at the Watco building, located at 315 W. Third St., beginning at 8 p.m. Thursday. Friends may also sign the register book and leave condolences online at www.brenner-mortuary.com. Arrangements are under the direction of the Brenner Mortuary, Pittsburg.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to the Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas c/o Dick Webb Memorial Fund. All proceeds will be shared to support the two main medical facilities that made it possible for Dick to enjoy 9 extra years of life: The Lung Transplant Program at Baylor Regional Transplant Institute in Dallas, TX where Dick underwent a lung transplant in 2000, and the Mt. Carmel Foundation at Mt. Carmel Regional Medical Center in Pittsburg, KS where Dick received post-transplant rehabilitation and care.

All donations are tax deductible and can be mailed to:

Community Foundation of Southeast Kansas
c/o Dick Webb Memorial Fund
PO Box 1448, 100 S. Broadway Ste. 100
Pittsburg, KS 66762
No title more important to railroader than ‘Papa Dick’

by Julie Fortman
Executive Administrative Assistant

Of all the titles he ever held, ‘Papa Dick’ was his favorite. Although he loved his day job at Watco, his deepest passion was his family, especially his grandchildren. Papa Dick to Kaleigh, Afton, Fallyne and Cameron ‘Bubba’ Lundy, and Megan and Jake Webb, Dick’s schedule revolved around opportunities to spend time with all of them. As the oldest grandchildren, the Lundy’s love the opportunity to talk about their Papa Dick.

“The most important thing in his life was family; kids, grandkids and extended family,” said Kaye Lynne Webb. “He was proud of his kids, but even more proud of his grandkids.”

Dick’s love for his six grandkids was evident to everyone, as he never missed a chance to attend any of their events.

“My grandpa was so selfless and supportive,” said Kaleigh Lundy. “He never missed the numerous dance recitals, sporting events or graduations, and there were a lot with the six of us. And don’t forget my mom’s theatre plays; he went to all of those too.”

Regardless of who was winning or losing, everyone knew Dick would be in the stands cheering.

Not even a 1,300 mile drive would stop Dick from supporting his family.

“When I was 14, my team won the Midwest Regional Baseball Tournament and we had the chance to fly to New York and play in the World Series,” said Bubba Lundy. “My Nonnie didn’t like to fly so she made grandpa drive all the way to Clifton Park, New York, just to watch us play baseball. They didn’t want to miss a single event in any of our lives.”

Though Megan and Jake Webb are much younger than the Lundy children, they too were blessed to have their grandparents at their events.

“Papa went to all of Megan and Jake’s events too,” said Fallyne Lundy. “Since he recently started to travel more I overhead my Nonnie and Papa talk about when and where Megan and Jake’s games would be so he could schedule his business trips around them.”

Afton Lundy also appreciates her Papa Dick’s support as their biggest fan, echoing Bubba’s story that no distance was too far for him to travel to be there for his family. However, Afton’s favorite time with Papa Dick was at the kitchen table where she had lunch with him nearly every day.

“No one was lucky enough to know my grandpa on a personal level and I think it’s important everyone knows how much of a caring and selfless man he was,” she said. “I knew that no matter what was going on in my life he would always be there for me. If I needed anything at all he was always the first one to offer to help. I was able to see him on a daily basis the last couple of years, either at the office or lunch at his house and I knew the second I walked in the door he was going to ask how school and everything else in my life was. I knew he was asking because he genuinely cared. He wanted nothing more than to see his family succeed in life and it wasn’t work for him because he thoroughly enjoyed it. I find it commendable that he fought so hard for so many years to stay healthy and find positives in life even when it would have been a lot easier not to.”

“My Papa Dick fought for his life the last nine years and that showed me he is the toughest man I will ever know,” Bubba said. “I have never known anyone who fought through so much in life and come out on top. I am going to miss him very much and am thankful for everything he did for me and our family. Without him we wouldn’t be who we are today.”
Webb leaves behind a long trail of friends

by Ed McKechnie
Chief Commercial Officer

Dick Webb was a man of few words but had a big vision for the railroad industry, and in turn Watco Companies and his family.

Back in 1984 when Dick was doing some consulting and thinking about going into business for himself, all he wanted to do was make a little money and stay ahead of the banks.

“Dick was a straight shooter,” said longtime Watco Customer Bill Stewart who is now the Director/Coal and Transportation of Cleco Power. “From the business perspective he knew how to put himself in the work and then keep it going. He always worked hard and diligently and lived within his means.

“By doing that, he was able to grow the business, and keep his Customers happy.”

Starting out, things were a little lean, and the direction his life at Watco would take wasn’t exactly clear.

“Dick called me in the spring of 1984, this was after Watco had been operating in DeRidder since July 1, 1983. He asked if I would like to take a ‘vacation’ to DeRidder, LA for few months,” said Jim Herman, laughing, who currently manages the Watco Mechanical Services Shop in Pittsburg.

“I was living with Rick in Dick’s mothers house, so I think he was also kicking me out, but I got down there (to DeRidder) with no intention of staying, and have now worked at Watco for 25 years,” said Herman.

So what was it about Dick that made employees stay for so long and have such a strong bonding relationship?

“Dick was a relationship guy,” said Mark Blazer, who was one of the original eight employees hired to work at the first Watco location in DeRidder. “He touched a lot of people throughout the industry and he had a lot of respect in the industry, and in the industries we served.

“Whenever I travel, everyone I meet still asks about Dick. Whether it is the KCS, UP, the BNSF or one of our other Customers, he made a lasting impression on everyone he met,” Blazer said. “He was clear, he was direct and he loved people.”

Several people that Dick did early business deals with agreed.

“When he (Dick) said something you could take it to the bank,” said Warren Wilson, the former Director of Short Line Marketing for the Union Pacific Railroad said. “When we sold Dick the SEK (the predecessor to the SKOL Railroad) some of us wondered if he was sane. Because it was a rough piece of railroad

“I have sold a lot of rail road miles in my life… and I can tell you that the railroad industry is going to miss Dick very much. He never complained, he never moaned or whined about what he bought. He just made it work. And by contrast we would sell rail roads to others that were better lines, and all they would do is complain” Wilson said. “I am now very happy that one of the last things I did at Watco was to come to the Watco 2008 Customer Appreciation event and Dick and I spent the day together. He was the same great guy that I first knew, and people all across the UP, and all of the Watco Customers I met, trusted him.”

His relationship with Charlie Harmon, who served as the Administrator of Rail Car Maintenance for Entergy, the anchor Customer for the Watco car shop in Coffeyville, actually preceded the beginning of Watco.

“Dick and I were friends since 1979 or 80,” Harmon said. “We were friends right from the first day and we went after each other right from the very first day.

“But at five o’clock, that was the end of the day. We then went to eat, and weren’t allowed to argue or be mad after five.

“What I did is I would call him and ask him to do something for me, he would always say, “I’ll call you back”, and he would. And he would always say, “OK, here is what we can do”, I very much appreciated and respected the way Dick would work with us and tried and get something done,” Harmon said. “He was an honest man that everyone respected when you met him.”

That relationship focus carried over from the Customer to the Watco team at every location.

“In the early days, if anyone was working a weekend, he probably was too,” Jim Herman said. “He didn’t expect anyone to do anything he wouldn’t do himself.”

And as the company grew, and the number of Watco shops and locations grew, Dick still made sure he had time for the team that was getting the job done for Watco’s Customers.

“He never came to shops where he didn’t put on his hard hat and safety glasses and walk around the shop and speak to the fellas,” Jim Herman said. “It wasn’t a formal visit, it was a personal visit to him to visit with each employee.

“If you informed him of a personal issue with any employee he wanted to make note of it,” Herman said.

At Christmas parties, you could tell that employees’ children were in the room, and of course his own grand children, held a special place in his heart.

“He loved coaching kids, he loved kids, he loved my kids. In 1990 after I became General Manager for the SKOL Railroad, my son Jeremiah played pee wee soccer, and Dick would know if I had a game. During the game I would look up on the hill and there he was, watching the game.”

That kind of compassion, Charlie Harmon believes, was the way Dick lived his life.

“Dick worried about his people, he cared about his people,” Harmon said. “I remember early on we walked the shop, and he could tell me every person by name and what everyone did. I have seen Dick reach into his wallet and loan people money, he never worried about it, he just knew that would pay him back.

“That’s just the way he was. We all lost a real good friend,” Harmon said.
Everyone defines community differently; to some it may be the town they live in and to others it may be a specific group such as members of a church. For Dick Webb, community was part of his family. “He taught us all what to focus on,” said Rick Webb. “His focus was family, extended family and community family. The range of people he touched is a testament to the kind of man he was.” Whether it was eating Sunday dinner with his kids and grandkids, watching a close friend’s child play ball or speaking on behalf of organ and tissue donation, Dick never passed up an opportunity to help others. Gene Iba, Pittsburg State University Men’s Basketball Head Coach, said there was always one fan he could count on. “This last year our basketball program didn’t have the greatest season,” Iba said. “But every time I looked up in the stands, Dick was there. It didn’t matter if we were winning or losing; he would be there. It was important to him to be important to us and for that I’ll always be thankful. He’s done so much for so many people and never asked for anything in return. He’s one of my heroes.” Chuck Smith, St. Mary’s Colgan High School Head Football Coach, said Dick’s dedication to not only his own family, but families of friends and Watco Team Members set him apart from the crowd. “I was always impressed because if you worked at Watco, Dick would show up at your kids’ games,” he said. “I would see him at a game and ask what he was doing there and he’d say he was watching someone’s kid from Watco. If Dick knew the family he would support them however he could. He was always so generous with support of Colgan, our kids and the community.” Homer Cole, longtime family friend, also recognized Dick’s devotion to others. “My wife and I met Dick and Kaye Lynne at the bowling alley when Rick and Susie were young,” he said. “He was always so supportive of local schools and the college. Wherever there was a need he would do his best to help. I considered him one of my closest friends. To me Dick was #1 and Kaye Lynne is right behind him.” Many people knew Dick for many years, but John Decker grew up with him and understands exactly why Dick turned out to be the giving person he was. “Dick and I went to grade school and high school together,” he said. “Dick was just a regular guy, except he had to work. Coming from a single parent family, he had to help his mother out, but she was a tremendous person and well thought of in the community. She was very honest and straightforward, just like Dick.” The characteristics Dick learned from his mother became very useful when he decided to join the National Guard along with some of his high school friends, including Decker. “Our senior year (1956) we joined the Guard,” Decker said. “We worked our way up through the ranks and all of us were interested in doing things to make ourselves better, especially Dick. We took extra duties and Dick eventually became the First Sergeant of our unit. The tenacity he had for improving himself and being a better soldier definitely started in his personal life. He was an extremely good NCO, very fair and strict. He established a standard and didn’t discriminate for any reason. I’m very proud to have known him and have always admired his accomplishments.” Dick’s tenacity and will to overcome were tested in 2000 when he received a lung transplant. Christine Barnes, St. John’s Medical Center Pulmonary Rehab Coordinator, realized immediately he was a fighter. “I first met Dick and his family when he arrived at St. John’s very sick with lung disease,” she said. “But every time I looked up in the stands, Dick was there. It didn’t matter if we were winning or losing; he would be there. It was important to him to be important to us and for that I’ll always be thankful. He’s done so much for so many people and never asked for anything in return. 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Although he didn’t like public speaking he addressed the annual Celebration of Life sponsored by the Midwest Organ Donation Association, again sharing his experience with others.” The legacy Dick Webb left behind has touched so many lives and undoubtedly will be shared by future generations. “I have been blessed to know this man and will miss him,” Barnes said. “Great men are always surrounded by great families and Dick was no exception.”
Watco family remembers lessons learned

by Tracie VanBecelaere
Managing Editor

It’s hard to describe the many facets of someone’s personality in a few words, but when Watco employees are asked about Dick Webb so often “old school” comes to mind.

“Dick said all he needed was his Big Chief tablet and a pencil, he didn’t much care for computers,” said John Chambers, Invoicing Auditor in the Pittsburg office.

Dick’s assistant, Barbara Crawford said when Dick was asked if he had a computer he’d say yes and with a twinkle in his eyes, point to her.

Dick may not have been interested in computers but he was interested in the preservation of railroad memorabilia. Chambers is a member of the Heart of the Heartlands organization, which was formed at the suggestion of Dick.

“Dick was interested in the preservation of railroad memorabilia and was always going out of his way to help the Heartland group. We did several train rides and he was the type who liked to watch everyone and make sure things were being done right. He’d sometimes follow in his car as the rides progressed and meet up with us at crossings just to make sure everything was going well.

One time he was following a train and he saw some rail fans taking pictures of the train; he made the train stop and let them get on for the ride. He was always doing things like that,” said Chambers.

Jeri Morandi, who has been with Watco for 15 years, agrees. “He was always doing something for someone. When they moved the offices from Coffeyville, Kans., to Pittsburg, Kans., I had to drive back and forth everyday while my husband and I tried to sell the farm. He worried about me driving so he arranged for me to rent a house close to the office. It was amazing what he did for others and how he asked about our family members who he hadn’t seen in years.

If you worked hard and did your job he would do anything for you. If you didn’t work hard he’d let you know that too. It was funny, one minute he’d be arguing with someone about work and then look at his watch, say it was time for lunch and off they’d go.”

If you’re talking about Dick Webb and don’t mention “frugal” you’re forgetting a big part of what he was. He was a child of the depression and if you didn’t have the money, you didn’t buy it. That frugal side of Dick never went away. Daughter Susie Lundy said he rarely bought anything for himself.

Jack Lewis, General Manager of the Coffeyville machine shop, remembers this quality. “We didn’t have all kinds of new tools, we made do with what we had. He taught us to treat the company’s money like it was ours. One question we always had to ask was, “if it were our money would we buy it?”. It was a good lesson to learn.

Lewis also liked Dick’s honesty. “Things were black or white with Dick, there wasn’t any gray, you knew exactly where you stood.” When I first met Dick he was an inspector with TTX. He wasn’t one to let things get by, he was tough, but fair.”

Keith LaCaze also uses the words tough and fair to describe Dick but says what he remembers the most about him was his big heart.

“One of my fondest memories of Dick are from the early days in Watco when Dick would come down to DeRidder, La., for visits with our first customer, Boise. Dick always took the time to know everyone’s name and always took just a moment to speak to all of his employees (it was a lot easier then with only 15 employees or so) but he made us all feel like we were special and an important part of the team.

Over the years Dick never allowed any of us to think that we were not part of something larger than just the property we were on at that time and at all times treated our customers and our people with dignity and respect.

I can say that each time I had a conversation with Dick, he always made me feel special and I left each conversation feeling better for having done so,” said LaCaze.

John Brown, COO West Region, says he first met Dick Webb shortly after what has proven to be one of the best career opportunities of his life, when he decided to enter the world of short line railroading by joining the Watco team.

“In 1993, the Webb family purchased the EIRR from the UPRR and it was not very long afterwards that I was introduced to the “man” himself, Dick Webb. This was the man who started it all, a regular Joe who had a vision, and through ability, hard work and desire had built a company from the ground up, this guy was what the American dream was all about, he was living his dream and best of all he was willing to share it with us.

It took me longer to figure out this man than I would like to admit. I really did not know how much he knew until I realized how much he cared about his family, his company and his employees.

“We all make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give.”

Dan Linden has been with Watco for 18 years and feels it was an incredible experience and blessing to have known Dick.

“He was a husband, a father, a grandfather, teacher, leader, and friend to many. I am sure we have all heard the expression “what you see is what you get”; that kind of sums it up when I think of our friend Dick Webb. He could be hard, kind and compassionate and through his own life experiences knew the daily struggles of making a living and raising our families.

One thing that Dick always said was “You need to take care of your family”. Thanks Dick for taking care of our Watco family and touching so many lives both directly and indirectly. We will truly miss you but will never forget you. Thank you, Dick, for believing in us.”
Watco Team looks forward to bright future

by Ed McKechnie
Chief Commercial Officer

Based on a great foundation, Watco has an even brighter future. Dick Webb started Watco Companies on July 1, 1983, based on a contract switching operation in DeRidder, Louisiana, with Boise Cascade.

On Friday, March 27, 2009, that relationship with Boise will have lasted 25 years, 8 months, and 27 days. Dick’s most apparent legacy with the company will be his lasting commitment with the employees who made a lasting commitment with Watco’s Customers. But their was also another legacy, a quiet legacy that has given Watco a strong financial position.

“Dick’s vision was simple,” Rick Webb, Watco’s CEO and son of the Watco founder said. “If you take care of the Customer and take care of the people taking care of the Customer you will be successful.”

“That is what we have been doing for more than 25 years and it is what we are going to still be doing for the future.”

Watco’s place in the rail industry has truly been a historic, almost meteoric rise in business history. Clearly anyone who met Dick knew he was special and always remembered him.

“Dick was not a guy you forgot,” said Charlie Harmon, the former account manager for Entergy, Watco’s second and now one of the largest Customers. “When you met him it wasn’t something you forgot the next day.

“He was committed to his people and committed to getting the job done,” Harmon said.

That personal relationship that Webb built with employees and Customers was based on a very strong financial footing, according to Terry Towner, President of Watco Companies, Inc.

“Dick will leave many legacies, but one we can all be grateful for is the strong financial position that Watco has,” Towner said. “Dick was an excellent businessman that a lot of people in America – especially in New York and Washington – could learn from.”

“The company has an excellent financial position. Dick taught all of us to not over extend ourselves financially, to make good hiring practices and take care of the Customer. Those things will take good care of the Company when the economy is good and when it slows.”

Towner pointed out that Watco’s growth has been through relationships and rather than going public, Dick grew the company a relationship at a time.

“Watco is in a very strong position and has a very good future. We will continue to grow the business on our existing properties and through selective and focused acquisitions,” Towner said. “Watco has had a long-term commitment to our people, our Customers and the communities that we serve. That commitment today is as solid as ever.”