

LONGTIME FUNERAL DIRECTOR DIES

by [Mary Jo Denton](#)

COOKEVILLE — Ralph Billingsley, who worked for over 50 years in the funeral business caring for the dead and the living with great compassion, died this morning following a brief illness. He was 83.

Billingsley, a funeral director and licensed embalmer who was highly respected in the profession, was known not only for his work, but for his warm and engaging personality. It was said that families who lost loved ones often asked specifically for his services at the funeral homes where he worked.



Friends said that last Friday evening, Billingsley and his wife were eating at a Cookeville restaurant when he became choked on a piece of meat.

People in the restaurant tried to help, but no one succeeded in using the Heimlich maneuver. Reportedly, two nurses who happened to be there administered CPR, and emergency treatment was also administered by paramedics who soon arrived.

He was taken to Cookeville Regional Medical Center and was in intensive care there for the past few days. He died there early today.

His many friends and co-workers are mourning the loss of a man they describe as like no one else, a friend to all, someone who did not meet a stranger, someone who reached out with kind concern to all those he encountered as they grieved in the face of death.

“He was so good at his profession,” said Wilma Brown, who worked with him at a funeral home at one time.

“He treated the dead with the same tenderness and respect he had for the living. He was so dedicated to helping the families who had lost loved ones. He would come to work in the middle of the night if necessary in order to do the best job possible for a viewing. I remember once he worked 30 hours straight to make sure that the body of a young woman who had died a violent death could be viewed by the family.”

David Horner of Hooper Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home said Billingsley’s expertise as a master embalmer was widely known and said he was often consulted by various funeral homes in the region for advice and instruction.

“Also, many families who had lost a loved one would call and ask that he personally take care of their loved one’s body,” Horner said.

“He’s been a friend, a mentor to many and he simply personified what a funeral director is. He never minded about the time and work it takes to serve families. He was highly respected by everyone who knew him.”

Davis Watts, a longtime friend who worked with Billingsley back in the 1960’s, said Billingsley had “great love and respect for everyone,” and said grieving families found his services very comforting.

According to Gary Medley, Billingsley’s son-in-law, Billingsley had worked full-time until about 18 months ago and remained very active up until last Friday.

“He loved people, loved visiting with them, and if you talked to him very long, you would find out how you were related to him somewhere back there,” Medley said.

Medley said Billingsley had been in the funeral business since 1958.

He was born in the little Jackson County community of Philadelphia, but had lived and worked in Cookeville for over 50 years. He and his wife, Hazel, have three daughters, Marcia Spurlock, Amy Medley, and Pam Shelton.

Funeral services will be held Saturday at 11 a.m. at Hooper Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home. The family will receive friends at the funeral home Friday from 4 to 8 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m. until time for the services.

Ralph Billingsley Obt.

COOKEVILLE — Funeral services for Ralph Dillon Billingsley, 83, of Cookeville, will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Nov. 10, from the Cookeville Chapel of Hooper-Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home. Interment, with military honors, will follow in the J.J. White Cemetery.

The family will receive friends from 4-8 p.m. on Friday, Nov. 9, and from 9 a.m. until time of services on Saturday at the funeral home.

Mr. Billingsley passed away Tuesday morning, Nov. 7, 2012, in Cookeville Regional Medical Center.

He was born Aug. 6, 1929, in Jackson County to the late Johnathan Buchannon and Martha Beulah White Billingsley.

Mr. Billingsley was a lifelong, active member of Post Oak Shade Free Will Baptist Church. He was an Air Force veteran, and a member of the Upper Cumberland Funeral Directors Association.

He was a widely known and respected funeral director and embalmer, serving families for more than 50 years. He began his career in the Spring of 1958 and, in 1960, received his Mortuary Science Degree from of John A. Gupton College. Early in his career he was associated with Miller Funeral Home in Maryville, Pettus-Owen & Woods Funeral Home in Nashville, and Ligon & Bobo Funeral Home in Lebanon. He was co-owner and later owner of Rogers & Billingsley Funeral Home in Livingston. However, the majority of his professional career was serving families at Hooper & Huddleston Funeral Home and Whitson Funeral Home. He was also active with local Masonic work. He was a 50 year member of Cookeville Masonic Lodge 266 F&AM; a member and past commander of Cumberland Commandry 26 (conferring hundreds of

degrees for Order Of The Temple). He was a member of Al Menah Shrine Temple and the Temples Motor Cycle Corps.

His family includes his wife of 63 years, Hazel Richards Billingsley (whom he married Jan. 20, 1949, in Crossville); three daughters and sons-in-law, Marcia and Donnie Spurlock and Amy and Gary Medley, all of Cookeville, and Pam and Marty Sheldon of Lynchburg, Va.; six grandchildren, Kristin (Jeremy) Tomes of Huntsville, Ala., Jonathan (Jenna) Medley of Cookeville, Cynthia Medley of Nashville, Edward (Pamela) Spurlock of Cookeville, Sarah Sheldon and Jared Sheldon, both of Lynchburg, Va.; seven special great-grandchildren, Addie and Camryn Tomes, Avery, Tucker and Ellie Medley and Steven and Emma Spurlock; and two brothers and a sister-in-law, Shirley Billingsley of Cookeville and Bernice and Frances Billingsley of Lascassas.

In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by an infant son, Ralph D. Billingsley, Jr.; sister, Kathleen Cowan; and a brother, Dewie Billingsley.

Pallbearers will be Jonathan Medley, Edward Spurlock, Jared Sheldon, Jeremy Tomes, Bob White, Zack Greenwood, Ken Matheny, Bill Matheny, Davis Watts, and David Richey.

Honorary pallbearers will be area funeral home directors and staff, cemetery employees and grave service employees, and members of Cookeville Masonic Lodge.

Rev. Dow Allen and Marty Sheldon will officiate at the services.

Hooper Huddleston & Horner Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements (931)526-6111.

You may share your thoughts and memories at our website www.hhhfunerals.com or at the funeral home.

Herald-Citizen, Cookeville, TN: 8 November 2012

*Read more about the people of Putnam Co., Jackson Co., TN and surrounding areas at:

<http://www.ajlambert.com>