



# Richard S. Cordrey

SEP 8, 1933 - AUG 21, 2022



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## **Richard S. Cordrey**

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**M**ILLSBORO, Del. - Former Delaware State President Pro Tempore and Secretary of Finance Richard S. Cordrey passed away peacefully at his Millsboro home on August 21, 2022, at the age of 88 years. He served as a member of the Delaware General Assembly for 26 years, 24 of which were spent in the State Senate from 1972 until 1996. In 2005, he was selected by Governor Ruth Ann Minner, a former Senate colleague, to serve as her Secretary of Finance, an office he held for the next four years.

Richard was born on Sept. 8, 1933, the younger of the two sons of John A. Cordrey and his wife, Rachel Smith Cordrey. He and his older brother, John S. "Jack" Cordrey grew up in Millsboro and attended local schools, working with their father in the family business, John A. Cordrey Feed Company, which had a large feed house near the center of town.

Richard graduated from Millsboro High School with the Class of 1951 and went on to Goldey-Beacom College in Wilmington, where he was blessed to meet a lovely young woman from Bridgetown, New Jersey, Mary Jane Bowen. They fell in love and married in 1953, remaining a wonderful team for the rest of their lives.

After college, Richard joined the U.S. Army and served at Fort Gordon, Georgia, where Mary Jane joined him. Richard and Mary Jane went to church every Sunday at the base chapel. One of Richard's favorite stories was about the Sunday they were late getting to church and the only unoccupied seats left were in the special pew set aside for the use of a frequent visitor to the base, then U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower, a former five-star general and ardent golfer who loved coming to Fort Gordon because of its proximity to Augusta National Golf Course. President Eisenhower welcomed the young, enlisted man and his bride to join him in his pew and after the service he had a friendly conversation with them.



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Upon their return to civilian life, Richard and Mary Jane settled in Millsboro, where Richard established the business that dominated his working life for the rest of his days, RSC Farms, with an office in a small building behind the feed house. He and Mary Jane were blessed by the birth of two sons, Richard Joseph and Stephen Bowen Cordrey. When the boys were older, Mary Jane took a job with the Millsboro School System, where she was employed for 21 years.

Richard was active in the community and in such organizations as St. Mark's Episcopal Church, where he and his brother, Jack, both sang in the choir, and the Millsboro Lions Club. He served as a member of the Millsboro Town Council from 1965 to 1973.

In 1970, Richard ran as the Democratic candidate for state representative in the 41st District, which extended all the way from Rehoboth Beach to Gumboro. He was elected and served in the House of Representatives for two years. In 1972, he challenged the incumbent state senator for the area, Republican Sen. Thomas Hickman of Bayard, and won by some 60 votes.

Richard's years in the Senate began with a shift to a Democratic majority after many years of Republican control. He served as Senate Majority Leader from 1974 until 1976, and as Senate President Pro Tempore from 1976 to 1996. At the time of his retirement from that body in 1996, he was the longest-serving president pro tempore in the nation and the longest-serving in Delaware history.

He served under five governors during his Senate years, Russell W. Peterson, Sherman W. Tribbitt, Pierre S. du Pont, IV, Michael N. Castle, and Thomas R., Carper; and a sixth governor, Ruth Ann Minner, as a cabinet secretary. During much of his time in the Senate the House of Representatives was under Republican control, and three of the six governors under which he served were Republicans. Richard quickly came to understand the importance of compromise in getting things done. His friend and successor in the Senate, George H. Bunting, Jr., remembers that soon after he was elected to the General Assembly Richard took him aside and told him, "if you want to be a success here, you have to learn to compromise." That was an important part of Richard's philosophy throughout his career.

Small town friendships were often more important than politics in the southern Delaware of those times and one of Richard's closest Millsboro friends was longtime Delaware U.S. Senator John J. Williams, a prominent Republican nationally, who retired from the Senate the same year, 1970, in which Richard was first elected to the General Assembly. He and Senator Williams were



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among a small group of friends who gathered most weekday mornings for breakfast at Millsboro's venerable Sam's Restaurant. Another member of their group was Preston C. Townsend, son of onetime Delaware Governor and U.S. Senator John G. Townsend, Jr.

One of their important topics of conversation at those breakfasts was state finances, about which Williams was especially knowledgeable. This was especially true after the near collapse of the Farmers' Bank of the State of Delaware in the mid-1970's. At the time, the state was the majority stockholder and most state finances were deposited in the bank. After that debacle, there was much discussion all over the state about ways to restructure state finances. The results included establishing Delaware's Rainy Day Fund and a constitutional provision requiring the state to budget only up to 98 % of anticipated revenues. Most of these important reforms were contained in the landmark Financial Center Development Act, the basics of which had been discussed at the breakfast sessions at Sam's Restaurant.

On the day the legislation was to be finalized, Governor du Pont flew down to Richard and Mary Jane's home in Millsboro in the Delaware National Guard helicopter, stopping along the way to pick up Richard's dear friend and colleague, Senator Thurman Adams, Jr., at his feed mill in Bridgeville, and landing in a grassy field behind the Cordrey's home. As they were meeting, there was a call for Senator Adams from his mill, asking him to please find an alternate way back so that the helicopter wouldn't have to land there again. It had blown everything everywhere.

Another of Richard's major interests in the Senate was agriculture. Thus, it came as a fitting tribute to his years of service when, in 2012, then-Governor Jack Markell and then Secretary of Agriculture Ed Kee announced the naming of the state's Department of Agriculture Headquarters in his honor. Richard said at the time that he considered the dedication a great honor. "If I had any choice of any building to have my name put upon, it would be this one right here," adding, "I have had the two best jobs anyone has ever had in the world-being a legislator and being a farmer."

Mary Jane preceded her husband in death, passing away on Jan. 5, 2016. Richard is survived by their two sons and daughters-in-law, Rick and Valery Cordrey and Steve and Kim Cordrey; by six grandchildren and their spouses, Michael and Kristen Cordrey; Ryan and Amanda Cordrey; Thomas Miller and Megan Schatzman; Casey and Blake Hershelman; Chris and Rachael Cordrey; and Chance and Paula Cordrey; and by eleven great-grandchildren. His survivors also include



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Mrs. Ina Cordrey, widow of Richard's brother, Jack Cordrey, two nephews and their families and many dear friends and relations.

The family would like to extend their warmest thanks to their old friend, James and Ellen Mitchell, and others for their help in caring for Richard in his later years.

A viewing will be held on Saturday morning, August 27, 2022, from 9-11 AM at Watson Funeral Home at 211 S. Washington Street, Millsboro, followed by a service at 11 AM, also at the funeral home. Interment will follow with a police procession to St. Mark's Episcopal Church Cemetery in Millsboro. A luncheon will follow at the St. Mark's Church Hall.

In lieu of flowers, contributions to Cordrey Charities would be appreciated. Cordrey Charities are dedicated to promoting and sharing the joys and rewards of gardening. Send contributions to: Cordrey Charities, 70 Creek Drive, Millsboro, DE. 19966.

Electronic condolences via [www.watsonfh.com](http://www.watsonfh.com)



## Tribute Wall

**Richard S. Cordrey**

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FF

**Frank Fantini** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

I have just learned of Richard's passing, so this tribute is a little late. As a young reporter for the Delaware State News I covered his first election to the state senate and remember the support he received from the family of Republican John Williams. He took out a Cordrey for Senate bumper sticker and cut off the image of the donkey to show me show Williams family members displayed the stickers as Republicans. Later, I covered Dick as Senate Pro Tem and vividly remember how he and his good friend Thurman Adams led the Senate by example -- two courtly Sussex County gentlemen of honor and conviction. My condolences to the family.



September 9 at 8:00 PM

GR

**Grace** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Our prayers and thoughts go out to the family. Dale Hudson- friend Charles Hudson- graduated with Richard



August 26 at 8:00 PM

EA

**Elva D. Allen** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

We, the Allen and Clark families, Mayola Allen's family, offer our sincere heartfelt condolences to Sen. Cordrey's family and friends. We greatly appreciated the respect and compassion shown to our mother by him, his wife and sons. He was a great man.



August 25 at 8:00 PM

AC

**Anne Canby** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Sen. Cordrey was a reasonable and decent gentleman. I remember a visit Karen Johnson (Secy of Public Safety) and I made to see Richard. We got a tour of the farm and had a nice visit with him. I loved the photo of the train on Rehoboth Ave in his office. He used to let me know how pleased he was when Rte 113 got widened. He would call me Orphan Annie & I called him Little Richard (sometimes)! Rest In Peace and thanks for your service to DE. (Secy DELDOT)



August 25 at 8:00 PM



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RM

**Robert (Bob) Marshall** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

My condolences to the Cordrey Family on your loss. A standup guy and always a gentleman I was honored to know during our years in the State Senate.

August 25 at 8:00 PM



DU

**Dave Urian** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Richard was a true asset to Delaware and his guidance will be missed by all!RIP!!!

August 25 at 8:00 PM



**Anonymous** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

August 25 at 8:00 PM



JS

**John J. Shwed** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Richard Cordrey served the people of Delaware with distinction in his positions in State Government and as a member of the International Association of Lions Club. He served locally in the Millsboro Lions Club and state-wide as Lions District Governor for Delaware. I was honored to join him one day in the Governor's office as the Governor signed a proclamation supporting the annual Lions Vision Days fundraising campaign. He was a compassionate, caring servant leader.

August 25 at 8:00 PM



JH

**Jeff Hilovsky** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Thank you for your many years of service to your State and community. The legacy you have left is a template for others to follow. I always enjoyed our discussions and your thoughtful insights on so many topics. You will be missed by so many but remembered by all. May God smile on your soul.

August 24 at 8:00 PM





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RR

**Randy Roberts** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

A 'one of a kind' true Delaware legend. They just don't make them like Mr. Cordrey anymore. Blessed to have known him.

August 24 at 8:00 PM



DB

**Donna & George Bunting** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

We remember Mary Jane and Richard's love of family as their greatest legacy.

August 23 at 8:00 PM



**Anonymous** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

August 23 at 8:00 PM



AW

**Aileen Welsh** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

A highlight in my teaching career occurred when Senator Cordrey came and read to my 2nd grade class at East Millsboro Elementary. His grandson Tommy was in my class that year. I also was fortunate to have his grandsons Ryan and Michael in my class when they were in 2nd grade at Long Neck Elementary. Great legacy! Wonderful family!

August 23 at 8:00 PM



DF

**Donna Fretz** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

RIP Richard you will be truly missed by everyone. You were a kind, sweet and caring person. I will miss seeing your smiling face at RSC and miss my hug & kiss that I always got from you. Love Donna.

August 22 at 8:00 PM





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LW

**Larry & Janet Whitten** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Sad to hear of Richard's passing. Our thoughts and prayers are with the family. I always enjoyed my conversations with him. A very nice man who will be missed.

August 22 at 8:00 PM



TB

**Teresa Berner** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

Richard was a great guy. I had the pleasure of knowing him for over 25 years. He did amazing work in the Senate and was a hard worker in the fields. He would definitely out work me. He always had good things to say and if you were down his words would make you laugh. Always asked are you keeping the boys strait. I would answer I am trying. HA HA. He will be sadly missed by many . Rest in peace my friend

August 22 at 8:00 PM



RJ

**Ruthi Adams Joseph** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

August 21 at 8:00 PM



**Anonymous** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

August 21 at 8:00 PM



RJ

**Ruthi Adams Joseph** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

The State of Delaware, in particular the General Assembly and Sussex County, has lost a true son and leader in Richard Cordrey. We will not see the likes of him again. With Love and Sympathy, Ruthi Adams Joseph we will not see the likes of him again

August 21 at 8:00 PM





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**Tommy Cooper** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

A Great man and Delawarean. He was The Real Deal. Tommy Cooper

August 21 at 8:00 PM



**Betsy Bradley** lit a candle in honor of Richard.

So sorry to hear of Uncle Ricgards passing. Lots of memories. The Batchelor Family.

August 21 at 8:00 PM





## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Richard by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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