

DENIS HENRY MCDONALD (1944 – 2022) – M.6.3.4.1



Denis McDonald In 2008
G. Andrew Boyd



Denis H. McDonald, Rex 2001.

Denis Henry McDonald, a New Orleans businessman and former king of Carnival whose decades-long battle with cancer spurred him to become a one-man support system for others suffering from the disease, died of melanoma Thursday, January 27, 2022, at his Covington home. He was 77.

"Cancer was a blessing because it gave him the opportunity to do things for other people, like take them to treatments or bring them meals," said his sister Anne Milling. "This gave him a ministry to help others on their journey."

McDonald was founder and president of Mac Dee Textiles Inc., a linen-supply firm. He sat on the boards of the Bureau of Governmental Research, the City Park Improvement Association, the Garden District Association, the Metropolitan Area Committee and Travelers Aid. He also was vice president of Children's Hospital's board.

"Denis derived his greatest pleasure from helping others," said Christian "Christy" Brown, a friend and former Rex. "He profoundly touched so many people's lives."

McDonald's struggle with cancer began in December 1995, when he was told he had multiple myeloma, a debilitating, bone-weakening cancer of infection-fighting plasma cells, and had, at most, three years to live.

But the Vietnam-toughened Marine officer, a veteran of Khe Sanh and the Tet offensive in 1968, fought back with the most aggressive treatment he could find, including two infusions of his own stem cells to produce a new blood supply after high-dose chemotherapy had wiped out his defective immune system.

He went into remission in January 1997. In February 2001, two years and four months after he had been expected to die, McDonald reigned as Rex.

"According to statistics, I'm not supposed to be here, but I am, so that makes this honor even more meaningful," he said in an interview at the time. "Too often, people give up mentally, and that's the worst you can do. I hope people realize that you can go on, that you can live a normal life as much as possible."

He kept going back for check-ups, Milling said. In 2012, after doctors said they found no evidence of multiple myeloma, they diagnosed melanoma.

McDonald, a native New Orleanian, graduated from Tulane University and then spent four years in the Marine Corps. He and his wife, Louise "Lulie" Smither McDonald, lived in New Orleans until last March, when they moved to Covington.

In a 2001 interview, McDonald credited his Marine training with helping him fight cancer.

"The Marine Corps taught me that we can go, physically and mentally, further than we think we can," he said. "That's what one must do when one has cancer: You have to push a little bit farther. You have to put one foot in front of the other and keep going."

In addition to his wife and sister, survivors include two sons, Hardie Gibson McDonald, of New Iberia, and Paul Delery McDonald, of New Orleans; a brother, Hugh McDonald, of Monroe; and four grandchildren.

Lake Lawn Metairie Funeral Home is in charge of arrangements, which are incomplete.

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