

Awana Co-Founder Arthur Rorheim Dies at 99

Arthur Reynold Rorheim, the co-founder of Awana and one of the pioneers in children's ministry, died Friday. He was 99.

Rorheim developed a children's and youth ministry from a club in Chicago and grew it into a global organization. He served the ministry for more than 70 years. Today, the organization has an outreach to more than 4 million children in more than 100 countries.

Rorheim, who served as Awana's executive director, president and president emeritus, still regularly visited the organization's headquarters into his 90s.

"I've never found the word 'retirement' in the Bible," he often joked.

"Art Rorheim was a man whose influence for the kingdom of God will have a lasting impact for generations to come," said Valerie Bell, Awana CEO, in a press release.

"Throughout his life, he tirelessly proclaimed the gospel and dedicated his life to equipping Christian leaders to share this message with millions of children and moms and dads all over the world," Bell said.

To that end, he was relentlessly focused on serving his Savior all the days of his life," she continued. "His heart and passion for Jesus inspired millions. Awana and the entire Christian community will dearly miss this extraordinary man."

Rorheim was born May 7, 1918, to Norwegian immigrants who eventually settled in Chicago near the future site of the North Side Gospel Center, the church where Awana would be born.

After serving as a volunteer, he went into full-time ministry in 1943 as the youth director of the North Side Gospel Center. At the time, most churches didn't have mid-week programs for children as they do today. In 1950, Rorheim and Pastor Lance "Doc" Latham took the concept beyond their church and founded the Awana Youth Association as a non-profit provider of curriculum and training materials.

Scripture memorization has long been one of the trademarks of Awana, and Rorheim lived it out in his own life. On one occasion, he even required his children and grandchildren to recite Psalm 1 before attending a family reunion.

Rorheim's friends and co-workers also praised him for his wit and love for children.

"He was so much fun, and he saw life as fun," said Jeff Schacherer, who was a friend and co-worker, in a press release.

"He loved to play jokes on people. He had a passion for life and he felt a need to share it with others. He had tremendous energy because he had a passion for helping others connect with God," he said.

When Schacherer and Rorheim traveled together, Rorheim wanted to sit separately so that he could have the opportunity to share his faith with the person sitting next to him.

"He didn't see bodies, he saw souls," Schacherer said.

Rorheim took Awana worldwide in 1972 when he started the first international Awana club in Bolivia. He eventually visited some 50 countries to spread the word about Awana, and he continued to travel for the ministry well into his 90s.

Rorheim continued to lead the national and international expansion of Awana until retiring as executive director in

1990. He then served as Awana president until 1999 before assuming the role of co-founder/president emeritus.

He is survived by his son and daughter-in-law, Ken and Katie; his daughter, Kathlyn Brock; four grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren and three great-great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Winnie; his parents, Olaus and Alida; his brothers Roy and Leif Oliver; and his son-in-law, Dennis Brock.

Rorheim's memorial service will be held at 11:00 a.m. Saturday, Jan. 27 at the Quentin Road Bible Baptist Church, 60 Quentin Road, Lake Zurich, IL 60047.

In lieu of flowers, memorial gifts may be donated to Awana's Rorheim Legacy Fund, account number 1400. {eo}

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