

Leonard “Lenny” Allen: A Lifetime in Distribution

Second-generation president of Allen Brothers Wholesale Distribution remembered for decades of leadership and a family legacy spanning three generations

Leonard “Lenny” Allen, the second-generation president of Allen Brothers Wholesale Distribution and a longtime figure in the convenience distribution industry, died Sept. 17 at the age of 97.

The Allen family’s distribution story began in South Philadelphia in 1910 with Lenny’s father, John Allen, and John’s brother Meyer. With approximately \$500 in family savings, they purchased a horse and wagon and began selling candy and other goods from store to store. The business grew from a South Philadelphia row home, eventually expanding through adjoining rowhouses as the operation grew.

Years later, following John Allen’s death, his rise from modest beginnings was chronicled in the Philadelphia Inquirer under the memorable description “Horatio Alger of South Philadelphia.” That family legacy became Lenny Allen’s to carry forward.

Lenny grew up in South Philadelphia, attended South Philadelphia High School and later Penn State University, where he met Pauline “Polly” Allen, his wife of 74 years. Following college, he joined the family business and ultimately became the second-generation president of Allen Brothers Wholesale Distribution.

Allen Brothers was much more than a career for Lenny. Under his leadership, the company grew far beyond its rowhouse beginnings and moved in the mid-1970s to a larger facility at 24th and Washington Avenue. Over the years, it evolved into a major regional distributor serving thousands of convenience stores, mom-and-pop grocery stores, drug stores and other retailers throughout the Mid-Atlantic.

In the mid-1980s, Lenny began transferring increasing responsibility for the business to his son, Jeff Allen, who ultimately became president of Allen Brothers and the third generation of the family to lead the company. By its 100th anniversary, Allen Brothers had become a major Mid-Atlantic convenience distributor operating from a six-acre Philadelphia headquarters and servicing thousands of retail locations.

Allen Brothers was ultimately sold in 2020. Jeff Allen is currently CEO of National Convenience Distributors, now considered the fourth-largest convenience-store distribution company in the United States, extending an Allen family legacy in distribution that began more than a century ago.

For Lenny, success was about more than growth. He took great pride in the Allen name, in preserving the reputation his father had built and in successfully carrying the business from one generation to the next.

Outside the business, Lenny loved basketball, tennis and golf, coached basketball for Adath Jeshurun Synagogue and was a passionate Philadelphia Eagles fan. He also loved the beach, bike riding on the boardwalk, music and performing. Above all, family remained at the center of his life. Lenny and Polly raised three children — Bradley Allen, Randi Rush and Jeff Allen — and their family grew to include six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

For Leonard “Lenny” Allen, Allen Brothers represented far more than a company. It connected a father, a son and a grandson across more than a century of family and business history.