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Marketing trailblazer Melissa McDill mourned

May 22, 2020



Missy (Melissa) McDill, founder and president of McDill Associates, died at home with family on Monday, May 18. She was 65.

A native of Salinas, CA, she established McDill Associates in the 1970s to serve the marketing needs of companies in various industries. Armed with a BFA from California College of the Arts and natural business savvy, Ms. McDill was at the forefront of agriculture marketing, helping to build some of the

largest brands in their formative years.

Sustaining a successful woman-owned business in the small town of Soquel, CA, was important to Ms. McDill. She loved raising her son with her husband in a tight knit community that values nature, creativity and giving back. As one of six kids, Ms. McDill was always surrounded by family and treated many that she knew as extended family. Outside of family and business, she was known as a powerhouse philanthropist. Ms. McDill was deeply involved with Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services, serving as board president for several years. Her nonprofit work has benefitted countless local families who have children with cancer.

Ms. McDill brought exceptional creativity, strategic thinking and heart to everything she did. She was a pioneer in the produce industry at a time when there were not many women, and mentored many others. Always thinking ahead, a few of her noted accomplishments include developing the idea for value added produce snack packs for kids, coining the term "Triple Washed" and inventing the first refrigerated footed bowl. To help fresh produce compete against salty snacks during the Super Bowl in the 90s, she gave Grimmway Farms the idea for carrot chips.

Her leadership earned hundreds of design and marketing awards for McDill's clients over the years, including Tanimura & Antle, California Giant Berry Co., Martinelli's, SnackWells, Duda Farm Fresh Foods and Sakata Seeds. More recently, she was focused on the agency's clients in the natural foods category, the rebrand of Pink Lady and the global launch of Cosmic Crisp apples.

Ms. McDill has built a dedicated and talented staff and client base over the past 40 years. McDill Associates will continue under the direction of Executive Vice President Lisa Hansen (18 years with McDill Associates) and board oversight by Julie McDill (over 25 years with McDill Associates).

She is survived by her husband, Bill Gurmin, and son, McCoy McDill-Gurmin (wife Effie); sisters Debbi McDill, Julie McDill (Larry), Laurie Leslie (Jim); brothers John McDill (George) and Budj McDill (Becky); stepchildren Tiffany Keith (Tim), Torre Gurmin (Jen); and grandchildren Matt, Justina, Lila, and Ace, and numerous nephews and nieces. The family will be holding a celebration of life to honor her memory at a date that is yet to be decided, given the current state of affairs. In lieu of flowers, they ask that you consider making a donation in her memory to [Jacob's Heart Children's Cancer Support Services](#).

Ms. McDill will be remembered as a larger than life spirit who loved dancing, travel, art and laughter.

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