



## ROBERT PAUL WARHURST December 8, 1938 - April 29, 2015

On Wednesday, April 29, 2015, Robert Paul "Bob" Warhurst, 76, passed away at his home in Fairfax, Virginia, after a long battle with cancer. On the last full day of his life, Bob was surrounded by family and friends before he passed peacefully early the next morning under the care of Hospice. Bob Warhurst was the co-owner and co-founder of Merrifield Garden Center, a large garden center, nursery and landscaping company with three locations in Northern Virginia. Bob started the garden center in 1971 with his good friend and neighbor Buddy Williams. In the beginning, there was a quaint red barn, a small store and less than an acre of plants. Over the next 44 years, Merrifield grew to become one of the largest independent garden centers in the country. Bob was born on December 8, 1938 in Russellville, Alabama. He was the fourth of eight children born to Claude and Mary Warhurst. Growing up in the rebuilding years that immediately followed the Great Depression, life was hard on the family. To help make ends meet, Bob got his first job at the age of seven years old at the corner grocery store in Russellville. He was hired for 50 cents a week. When he was in the middle of the eighth grade, Bob quit school and moved to Northern Virginia to make his way in the world. He became an apprentice bricklayer for his older brother Lee, who owned his own contracting business. Two years later, he met Billie Jean Allgood and fell in love at first sight. They were married on January 16, 1957. He was 18 and she was 14. It was a happy marriage that lasted 58 years. While laying brick in the booming suburban developments around Northern Virginia, Bob noticed there was a need for trash pick-up service, so he started the Warhurst Trash Company in 1963. In running the trash business, Bob saw that many customers were throwing away items that still had value, so he began selling those items at The Tradin' Post, a second hand store he started in the Kamp Washington section of Fairfax. Later, Bob decided to start selling plants at The Tradin' Post. That was so successful he decided to open a nursery to sell plants full time, and the following year he opened Merrifield Garden Center. Although his life was defined by hard work, Bob led an adventurous life, riding horses, driving fast cars and flying airplanes. He earned his pilot's license in 1977. Bob was very active in the local business community and helped start two banks - The Horizon Bank of Virginia, which was founded in 1990 and then sold ten years later to Southern Financial Bank, and Virginia Heritage Bank, which was founded in 2005 and sold in June of 2014 to Eagle BankCorp. Throughout his life, Bob improved - and often changed - the lives of many people. Not only was he able to do this by having a successful business, but by the enormous generosity of his heart. In 1998, Bob bought a seven acre piece of property at historic Hope Parke in Fairfax, Virginia, where George Washington often visited many years ago. He built his dream house, which became the center of the family's activities. Bob was very active in the community and gave generously to many charitable and civic organizations. Bob's fascinating and inspirational life was chronicled in a recent book, *The American Dream: The Rags to Roses Story of Bob Warhurst and the Founding of Merrifield Garden Center*. Bob was preceded in death by his father Claude, mother Mary and brothers Charles, Jim, Claude (Tracy) and Lee. Survivors include Bob's wife Billie Jean Warhurst; children Debbie Warhurst Capp (husband Rob; children Danny and Sarah), Robert Warhurst, Jr. (wife Lynn; children Lyndsey, Ashley and Bobby), Larry Warhurst (wife Leslie; children Chance, Jake, Whitney and Harley), Donny Warhurst (girlfriend Karen Velehoski) and Kevin Warhurst (wife Chris; children Madison and Grace); sisters Margene Scruggs and Jane von Pingel; brother Carl Warhurst and many extended family members. A viewing will be held on Sunday, May 3, at Fairfax Memorial Funeral Home, 9902 Braddock Road in Fairfax, Virginia from 2 to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8 p.m. The funeral service will be held on Monday, May 4, at Vienna Presbyterian Church, 124 Park Street NE in Vienna at 1:30 p.m., followed by an interment at National Memorial Park in Falls Church. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to the or Capital Caring Hospice Services. [www.fmfh.com](http://www.fmfh.com)