

William Earl Lobeck, Jr.
April 20, 1940 - December 16, 2025



William E. Lobeck, Jr. lived a life defined by vision, discipline, generosity, and deep love for family, friends, and the people he worked alongside. His entrepreneurial instincts, financial insight, and steady leadership shaped more major brands in the daily car rental industry than any other individual, leaving a lasting imprint on the automotive world and on everyone fortunate enough to know him.

Bill began his career in the 1960s at Pontiac and Chevrolet dealerships in Norfolk, Virginia, where he quickly recognized the unmet needs of daily car rental companies and made them his largest customers. Guided by an ability to see opportunity where others saw obstacles, he created the industry's first dealer repurchase program and established a special purpose leasing company to better serve those customers. What began as a practical solution soon became an industry standard. Manufacturers took notice, and today repurchase programs and special purpose leasing agreements are foundational to both the automotive and daily car rental industries.

His success as an innovator eventually led him to join one of his customers, Dallas based American International, where he became President and Chief Executive Officer in 1979. Over the next eleven years, Bill led the company through extraordinary growth, expanding from 18 offices in seven states to nearly 300 locations nationwide. His leadership style combined clear expectations with quiet confidence, inspiring teams to believe in what they were building together.

In 1981, Bill and four partners purchased Thrifty Car Rental, a North American franchise system with tremendous potential but serious financial challenges. Bill approached the task with patience and precision, reengineering every aspect of the business from financial operations to public branding. The results were remarkable. Thrifty's resurgence culminated in a highly successful initial public offering in 1987.

Just two years later, Chrysler acquired Thrifty, with Bill remaining as President and Chief Operating Officer. Under Chrysler's ownership, he orchestrated a restructuring that formed Pentastar Transportation Group and led the acquisition of Dollar Rent A Car, Snappy Car Rental, and General Rent A Car. The combined organization, later known as Dollar Thrifty Automotive Group, exceeded one billion dollars in revenue and became a major force in the industry.

In 1995, Bill turned his attention to another company in need of renewal. National Car Rental, owned by General Motors, was a respected brand that had struggled financially for years. Together with his partners, including his wife Kathy Taylor, Bill acquired National and led a comprehensive turnaround. Through disciplined operations, strategic fleet expansion, and industry leading rate strategies, National's revenue increased by more than one third in just twelve months and experienced only a single unprofitable month under their leadership.

That success drew the attention of AutoNation, which had recently acquired Alamo Rent A Car. In 1997, Bill brought National into the AutoNation family and became President and Chief Operating Officer of AutoNation's Rental Group. Comprised of National, Alamo, and CarTemps USA, it grew into one of the largest daily rental organizations in the world.

After Bill retired from AutoNation two and a half years later, the rental group eventually fell into financial distress. Believing deeply in its potential, Bill, Kathy Taylor, and Cerberus Capital Management reacquired the assets in 2003, bringing the companies out of bankruptcy under the name Vanguard Car Rental USA. With Bill once again at the helm, the Alamo and National brands quickly returned to profitability. Vanguard became one of the most financially successful companies in the industry and, in August 2007, was acquired by Enterprise Rent A Car. As a testament to Bill's leadership and the loyalty he inspired, members of his Vanguard management team have continued to gather annually since that time.

Beyond business, Bill gave generously of his time and resources to philanthropic causes and nonprofit organizations. His lifelong love of automobiles extended beyond the boardroom. He built an impressive car collection, earned a prestigious Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance award, and twice participated in both the Mille Miglia and the California Mille.

Growing up in Virginia Beach, Bill developed a passion for sailing that stayed with him throughout his life. He sailed with family and friends across the world, including Greece, Italy, and France, finding joy and peace on the water.

Those who knew Bill will always remember his unmistakable laugh, his quiet generosity, and his steady routines. His mornings were marked by exercise, orange juice, granola, yogurt, and one

cup of coffee. Evenings often ended with a Molson Ice, a signal to those around him that the day had been well lived.

Bill was awarded an honorary doctoral degree from Old Dominion University, where he earned his Bachelor of Business Administration and was a member of Kappa Alpha fraternity. He was inducted into the University of Tulsa Collins College of Business Hall of Fame and honored by the Tulsa Historical Society for his contributions to the community.

Bill was married to Kathy Taylor, former Mayor of Tulsa and former Oklahoma Secretary of Commerce. Partners in both life and business, they approached every acquisition and sale together, blending their talents seamlessly. They shared a love of travel, sailing, and exploring the world through food, wine, and culture. Family vacations were a priority and took them everywhere from Montana to the Galapagos to sailing along the Italian coast. Each year on their anniversary, July 30, Bill delighted in surprising Kathy with a trip to someplace at least thirty degrees cooler than Tulsa.

Bill found his greatest joy in time spent with his family. He deeply loved his daughter Molly Pellegrini, her husband Hank, and their children Annie, Will, Meg, and Charlie; his stepdaughter Elizabeth Frame Ellison, her husband Chris, and their sons Taylor and Wyatt, his daughter Peake Lobeck Mosier, her husband Louis, and granddaughters Caroline Graham Hayes and Madison Graham. He was also devoted to his beloved dog, Lola.

He was preceded in death by his mother, Page Ackiss Lobeck; his father, William Earl Lobeck; and his sister, Gayle Lobeck Farrow. His family extends heartfelt gratitude to all who supported him during his decade of care, especially his best friend Ronnie Watson, his devoted caregiver Karen Mallory, and Karen Elzea, whose steadfast help meant so much.

In lieu of flowers or other gifts, the family asks that donations in Bill's memory be made to the Alzheimer's Association Oklahoma Chapter, the Philbrook Museum of Art, or Old Dominion University. Services will be announced at a future date.