



## W. Howard Rooks

February 8, 1934 - October 6, 2022

W. Howard Rooks, 88 of Sarasota died peacefully at his home on October 20, 2022, surrounded by his loving daughter and grandchildren.

Howard was born on February 8, 1934, in Turkey, North Carolina, the second of two children born to William and Orpha Rooks. The son of a North Carolina tobacco farmer, Howard was the first from his town to attend college. He continued to work the fields with his family and hitchhiked rides to East Carolina University where he became class president. He received his BA in 1956 and, years later, became a Trustee of the University. Howard served two years in the U.S. Army before becoming a high school teacher in Alexandria, Virginia where he met his wife of 25 years, Sue Gilliam Rooks.

One evening, after closing on their new home in Alexandria, Howard noticed the real estate agent earned more on one transaction than he made teaching school for an entire year. Howard decided to get his real estate license and try to sell houses on the weekends to supplement his salary. He quickly fell in love with the business, gave up teaching, and in 1968, founded Mount Vernon Realty in Alexandria. Over the next 25 years, he grew the company to over 3,000 agents and 62 offices. Before he sold the company to Weichert Realtors in 1991, Mount Vernon Realty became the 10th largest privately owned real estate company in the United States. He was an inspiring and charismatic leader, driven by helping his agents create their own dreams and meet their

goals.

Following the sale of his business, Howard began to spend more time in Sarasota where he had purchased a small home on Lido Key in 1970. He was passionate about Sarasota and knew one day he would retire there. He spent the last 30 years of his life in Sarasota, but never really retired. An admitted "deal junkie," Howard was soon creating, developing, partnering, and investing full-time in Sarasota. He was quickly joined by his daughter Lisa and her husband Bob Morris in many of these real estate investments. He was also involved in several related business pursuits including The Plaza restaurant on Longboat Key, Cork and the Bottle Shop on St. Armands Circle, and Amore restaurant in downtown's Burns Court neighborhood. His initial passion was the real estate itself, but he came to love the process of creating a community, spending time with the staff, and enjoying meals, drinks, and great music with his friends and regulars at the piano bar.

Howard was also passionate about the modern architecture of Sarasota and his Lido Shores neighborhood. At a time when Mediterranean style homes were in favor, he sought to bring more classic modern architecture to Sarasota. Having no experience in building, construction, or design, Howard sought out the best people in each field; he partnered with Guy Peterson, Pat Ball and Rick Carlisle to help bring his vision to life. He restored and improved several of the most important Sarasota School of Architecture houses and built several high-end waterfront spec homes.

While Howard always hoped to make a profit, sometimes he didn't, especially during times of recession. What was most important to Howard was creating projects that were fun, beautiful, and interesting; projects that would create delight and benefit others. He had big ideas and knew how to connect with people who could do what he could not. Howard was the ultimate optimist and a fearless risk-taker, always motivated by the creative process. He measured

his success by his relationships with others, what he was able to create, and how he made others feel. Over the years, money came and went, and came again, but never seemed to influence who he was and how he treated other people. He had a deep inner faith that all would be well. He was extraordinarily grateful for his life and for those in it.

Howard was an active Rotarian for decades. He was a member of St. Armands Lutheran Church and served as a Stephen minister there. He served on the Board of Directors for Meals on Wheels, Sarasota. He was a two term Trustee of East Carolina University and served on many other charitable and business boards during his professional careers in both Alexandria and Sarasota.

Howard was predeceased by his beloved son, Gregory Kent Rooks. He is survived by his daughter Lisa Rooks Morris of Sarasota, his grandchildren Kathryn "Kate" Morris and Robert "Tripp" Morris, his big sister, Janice Tolar, and his niece, Jacki Cavanaugh both of Newport, NC.

A memorial service will be held on Monday, November 7 at 10:00am, St. Armands Key Lutheran Church, 40 Adams Dr., Sarasota, FL 34236

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions can be made to St. Armands Key Lutheran Church, 40 North Adams Drive, Sarasota, FL 34236 or SAKLC.com.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

NOV 7. 10:00 AM (ET)

St. Armands Key Lutheran Church  
40 N. Adams Drive  
Sarasota, FL 34236

# Tribute Wall



“ *An absolute Gentleman. Howard gave me a draw against commission \$200/mo (1969) when just a fledgling company having just split with Shaw Realty. Shaw took the commercial and W Howard Rooks took the Residential. I worked in the Woodbridge Office and followed Dan Finnagan to the Dale City office when that opened. The first year this rookie of the year went with him to the Bahamas. The following year we went to Spain together. Every Birthday we would go out to dinner and he would tell me why the upcoming year was going to be so good. At my 30th he told me I still had the fire of a young man while I was gaining the experience of a seasoned pro. My most influential Mentor and friend. Last time I saw him about ten years ago we went to dinner at St Armand's Circle. I was proud to finally be able to buy him dinner. He was one of my top three friends. He was an amazing friend and person. I will miss him. He was definitely TOP OF THE BRASS! God Bless him and Lisa whom I last saw in Marlin Forest when she was about 8. Rest in Peace my friend. May God welcome you with open arms*

---

**Gary Raskopf** - November 20, 2024 at 06:36 PM

LR

“ I’m Leo Russell. Howard hired me straight from the Fairfax County PD. I was 26 years old at that time. Colonel Holbrook and Howard saw something they apparently liked. I studied hard and was licensed in 1974 and began my sales career in the Woodbridge VA region. I was motivated to succeed and consequently won the 1975 Mount Vernon Realty Rookie of the Year Award. I continued working hard and obtained my broker license in 1977. In 1978 Howard offered me the position of sales manager of a start up office in Stafford VA. I had no idea what I was doing. Fast forward 2 years. Stafford turned out to be the top Listing branch in the company as well as producing top agents. The company was growing. More branch openings. In 1978 Howard promoted me to regional VP in charge of all branches outside the DC Capitol beltway. Dick Purvis was Executive VP and together we saw even more growth. Finally in 1991, after 16 years. I decided to open my own RE business. Howard was very supportive of my venture.

*It saddens me deeply that I only learned of Howard’s death a year later. He was my mentor. More like the Dad I never really had. I miss him. I have for years. I’m sorry I didn’t stay in touch and for that I will eternally be sorry. Howard was a good man. He truly cared about people. A great business man and a great father. So long my friend. I’ll see you again.*

*Leo Russell  
Fredericksburg VA*

---

**Leo Russell** - November 17, 2023 at 06:47 PM

PH

“ Howard made a great impression on my life beginning in 1984, hiring me as a assistant property manager while I finished my degrees at George Washington University. We meet one Tue evening and and talked for two hours—we immediately had a connection! He offered to employ me while going to law school with the idea that I’d would soon take over his legal department when his current in-house attorney retired. Life made some twists and turns along the way but I always tried to keep up with his inspiring life. After my 1st retirement in 1997 I found myself investing in a mortgage banking company —always searching for growth I directed my offices to search out realtors (Howard was always in the back of my mind). In 2003, I started building custom estate beach homes along the Gulf Coast. By 2007, I added a real estate license to my journey, now after 15 years in Real Estate/Development I always find myself just one deal from retiring, but thanks to Howard I cant turn loose! Thanks for being such a mentor. I am so blessed to have followed you all these years. Many blessings to the family, RIP my dear friend.

---

**Pj Howard** - February 17, 2023 at 12:24 AM

YS

“ I have known Mr. Rooks since 1987. He was a very kind and generous man. He always goes out of his way to help people. May your soul rest in peace.

---

**YUSUF Badamassi SANU** - January 10, 2023 at 11:32 AM

BB

“ Dear Lisa and family - am so very sorry to hear of your Dad's death. Howard was bigger than life but always retained that Carolina down homeness!

He was smart and kind and contributed significantly to our Old Town community.

I send you loving thoughts at this very difficult time, Barbara Beach

---

**Barbara Beach** - November 07, 2022 at 08:09 PM

RS

“ When I heard this sad news, so many fond memories warmed my heart. There were special times when Howard joined Jake and me on our deck overlooking the Potomac, a Florida New Years Eve, a feast of Stone crabs, and a memorable visit to his architectural treasure on Lido Key. All are good, lasting memories of a kind and thoughtful friend, a cherished friendship.

Rita Morgan Stone

---

**Rita Stone** - November 03, 2022 at 09:23 PM

RD

“ Having only known Howard a couple of years while living in Sarasota, it is with sadness to learn of his passing. Such a jovial, kind, and heartwarming person. He will be missed. Our heartfelt sympathy to his daughter, Lisa, and the entire Rooks Family.

---

**Richard & Catherine Dunne** - November 02, 2022 at 12:42 PM

BG

“ I knew Howard when I lived in Old Town Alexandria, Virginia. We often met at Ecco Cafe for drinks and dinner. We also were on the Business Advisory Council at East Carolina University together. He was a very nice man. Bill Grant, Charlotte, NC.

---

**Bill Grant** - November 02, 2022 at 11:01 AM

CK

“ *I worked with Howard and always enjoyed his kindness, thoughtfulness, and gentle manner. Honored I got to get to know him.*

---

**Carla Rayman Kidd** - October 31, 2022 at 01:44 PM

DM

“ *Howard was the quintessential southern gentleman, always kind and courteous, and a person who made you feel very important when you were with him.*  
*Known widely for his real estate expertise and investments, those who knew Howard personally respected him even more for his honesty and the deep love he had for his family and friends. He also loved Sarasota, and his contribution to modern architecture in the local real estate market will live on for many years to come.*  
*My wife, Debbie and I will miss Howard's warm smile, kind heart and constant positive attitude regardless of the circumstances. He will be greatly missed.*

---

**Danny Marr** - October 29, 2022 at 09:24 AM



“ *Country Basket Blooms was purchased for the family of W. Howard Rooks.*



---

October 28, 2022 at 04:57 PM

HS

“ Howard was the ultimate gentleman and businessman. Always smiling, he uplifted the spirits of all who surrounded him. He just loved people and parties and making business deals. Next to his beloved family, real estate was his passion. He adored Lisa and her children and was so proud of all their accomplishments. His family lost a trusted patriarch and the world lost a great person.

---

**Helen Sosso** - October 25, 2022 at 08:20 PM

DM

Howard was the quintessential southern gentleman, always kind and courteous, and a person who made you feel very important when you were with him.  
Known widely for his real estate expertise and investments, those who knew Howard personally respected him even more for his honesty and the deep love he had for his family and friends. He also loved Sarasota, and his contribution to modern architecture in the local real estate market will live on for many years to come.  
My wife, Debbie and I will miss Howard's warm smile, kind heart and constant positive attitude regardless of the circumstances. He will be greatly missed.

---

**Danny Marr** - October 29, 2022 at 08:47 AM

AW

“ Howard was always a kind, gracious, gentle, man, who enjoyed his life and the people in it. I was privileged to know him for 17 years and I will miss him.

Ann

---

**Ann Walborn** - October 25, 2022 at 06:12 PM