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William P. Densmore

June 16, 1924-January 18, 2013

The service

A SERVICE MARKING THE WORK, COMMITMENTS AND COLLABORATIONS OF WILLIAM P. DENSMORE WAS HELD SATURDAY, FEB. 2, 2013 AT THE FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH, 90 MAIN ST., WORCESTER MASS.

LINKS:

[The printed program \(PDF download\)](#)

[MP3 audio recording of the gathering](#) (1 hr, 15 mins., 70 MB)

[Excerpts from a eulogy by the Rev. Barbara Merritt](#)

[Bill Densmore Jr.'s remarks: "The Carpenter"](#)

[Betsy Densmore ReChord's remarks: "The Teacher"](#)

[S. Paul Reville's remarks: "Three Gifts"](#)

[Michael True's remarks](#)

[VIDEO: "If We Don't Teach Peace"](#)

[VIDEO: Reflecting on the Vietnam War](#) (Worcester Art Museum oral history)

Photos / favorite quotes

"Five faces" set of [Kyle Forbes Bissell](#) photos:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/billdensmoresr1924/sets/72157632568560460/>

As slide show:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/billdensmoresr1924/sets/72157632568560460/show/>

PHOTOS: Full set -- **The pictorial life** of Bill Densmore, 1924-1913

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/billdensmoresr1924/sets/72157632568579016/>

As slide show:

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SLIDES: **Sayings and favorite quotes** of Bill Densmore:

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The biography

LONG BIOGRAPHY / WILLIAM P. DENSMORE / WORCESTER, MASS.

Source: Family, 617-448-6600 / wpdensmore@gmail.com

William P. Densmore, ex-Norton executive, civic organizer, state education leader, 88; celebration of civic purpose held Feb. 2, 2013

WORCESTER, Mass. -- William P. Densmore, a former senior manufacturing executive of Norton Co., nonviolence advocate and one of the architects of the state's 1990s-era education reform which helped propel Massachusetts' schools to among the best in the nation, died Friday Jan. 18, 2013 at his home, of heart disease. He was 88.

A gathering which celebrated Densmore's collaborators, projects and way of living was held on Saturday, Feb. 2, at 11 a.m., at the First Unitarian Church of Worcester, 90 Main St., where Densmore was a member and served as active volunteer.

In an active life of civic engagement during and following retirement from Norton Co., (now a brand of Saint-Gobain, the largest global manufacturer and supplier of abrasives), Densmore collaborated on initiatives involving public education, health care and end-of-life policy. He was a founder of the Worcester-based Center for Non Violent Solutions and a longtime member of Responsible Wealth, a network of over 700 individuals who advocate for fair taxes and corporate accountability.

"[He] has lead the most active, civically committed life I have ever witnessed," former Massachusetts education secretary S. Paul Reville wrote in a 2008 tribute to Densmore. "He is active on peace studies, health-care costs, end-of-life planning, school politics and income distribution . . . he is my role model . . . a great catalyst, a broker of ideas, a motivator and inspiration"

He was named winner of the Isaiah Thomas Award for Distinguished Community Service in a ceremony May 14, 1997 at Mechanics Hall. The award citation called him "a low-key leader who prefers to work behind the scenes . . ." and noted his appreciation of Bertrand Russell's 1950s book, "The Conquest of Happiness," that concludes a happy person is outwardly directed who helps others out of a sense of personal satisfaction rather than moral duty.

Since becoming involved in civic affairs in the 1960s, Densmore helped found, or served on, 25 boards of educational and community organizations, including Dynamy, the Massachusetts Board of Education, and the Alliance for Education. As a state Board of Education member (1970-1977), he faced key decisions on Boston school desegregation.

He came to believe that court-ordered desegregation of Boston's schools was morally right, but practically wrong, writing in 1991 "racial balancing to prescribed percentages became an obsession which overshadowed the goal of effective education for all." He authored "The Results Approach to Education and Educational Imperatives" and helped write the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education report, "Every Child A Winner," which provided key recommendations for the state's 1993 education-reform act. Densmore served for many years as a consultant and advisor to non-profit boards and management teams, conducting his "Elements of Effective Management Assessment Process," and honing his "Twelve Characteristics of Effective Organizations" while advising on board effectiveness, customer satisfaction, productive and personnel strategies.

In December, 2011, he was honored at a Clark University dinner for helping to found the [Center for Non-Violent Solutions](#), a nationally unique non-profit that teaches violence-prevention skills and tolerant behavior in Worcester-area schools. "Nonviolence is a concept that has only been talked about for, relatively, a few years as compared with warfare, which has been with us forever," Densmore said. "Our whole culture is pervasive about violent solutions. It always has been somebody won/somebody lost, instead of a win-win solution." He said he hoped the center could become a national model.

Earlier, he served as executive director of the Worcester Consortium for Higher Education and taught management courses part time at both Clark University and the College of the Holy Cross. He also helped found and lead the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education, the Worcester Chapter of Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) and served on the boards of both The Putney School and Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He graduated from both.

Besides his interest in education, Densmore has served as board chairman of the Worcester Area Systems for Affordable Health Care, and as a member of the University of Massachusetts Medical Center Hospital Management Board and the Central Massachusetts Health Systems Agency board. He helped to found Worcester-based [Better Endings](#) to encourage compassionate end of life care. He is a former director of the Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts and the Greater Worcester Community Foundation.

Densmore was born June 16, 1924 in Brookline, Mass., the son of Annie Louise (Walley) and Edward Dana Densmore. His father was a mechanical engineer and principal with the Boston firm of Densmore, LeClear and Robbins. Densmore's WPI degree was in mechanical engineering, and his interests ranged widely across management practice and theory, literature, music, politics and public policy. "As you know, I used books including *Antigone*, Machiavelli's *The Prince*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and about 30 more contemporary fiction and non-fiction books as an integral part of my General Manager course in the Clark MBA program," he once wrote. He also loved tennis and sailing.

In the U.S. Naval Reserve, he attended accelerated officer training school at the U.S. Naval Academy and served as a fire-control officer on the first U.S.S. Enterprise aircraft carrier at the very end of World War II, discharged in July, 1946, as an ensign.

Densmore joined Norton, a Fortune 300 multinational manufacturing company, upon graduation from WPI and completion of his naval service. After 19 years with the company, he became in 1965 a division general manager and corporate vice president, and senior vp and member of the executive committee in 1981. He took early retirement at the end of 1982.

He often spoke about his appreciation for the opportunity Norton gave him to contribute time to community and civic causes, particularly when company executives asked him to lead Norton's neighborhood disaster recovery response after the devastating 1953 tornado. "I was so fortunate to have been hired in 1946 and to have been in the right place at the right time over and over," he wrote in 2010 at the 125th anniversary of Norton's founding.

As he pursued interests in management consulting, educational and non-profit leadership and entrepreneurship, Densmore wrote that he gradually "developed major concerns about corporate governance, excessive corporate influence on government, and the growing gaps in wealth and income." He collaborated with Boston-based United for a Fair Economy, and became a founding member of UFE's Responsible Wealth program at its first meeting in New York in December 1996. He served on its steering committee and helped develop a shopping-list of rule changes needed in corporate governance and regulation.

At a Nov. 1993 dinner in Worcester, where Densmore received a "brotherhood award" from the National Conference for Community and Justice, he spoke of "signs that America is slipping into polarized, separatist views: Rich vs. poor; black vs. white, cities vs. suburbs." He continued: "There is wide disagreement over what to do. The big need is to reason together and to substitute cultural humility for cultural arrogance."

"There is an old allegory about the sailor on a ship that sprang a huge leak and was sinking," Densmore added in his 1993 remarks. "He went below, woke his buddy and said, 'We've got to get out of here; the ship's sinking.' His buddy rolled over and said, 'What do I care? It's not my ship.'" Actually, Densmore said, we're all in the same boat. "Too many of us look at the problems of other groups or other neighborhoods or the inner cities of America and think 'it's not my ship.' But it is."

In November, Densmore joined with U.S. Rep. James P. McGovern, D-Mass., and others to plan a May 3-4 working symposium at UMass Amherst entitled, "Rules Change: Resetting the Playing Field for Corporations, People and Democracy." (<http://www.ruleschange.org>). In a white paper Densmore was working on at the time of his death, he wrote: "Changes in the way we govern corporations are required to revitalize participatory democracy in the United States. One barrier may be a perception that these changes are new or radical. In fact dozens of books have been written over 20 years that address key principles of policy rules changes." (<http://corporateruleschange.org>)

Densmore leaves his wife of 64 years, Martha (Lowell) Densmore (they married Nov. 5, 1949), and three children: Elizabeth C. Densmore, of Newport Beach, Calif., married to Robert T. Rechord; William P. Densmore Jr., of Williamstown, Mass., married to Betsy E. Johnson, and Deborah D. Cary of Princeton, Mass., married to Charles R. Cary, as well as four grandchildren, Eliza E. Densmore, Christopher D. Densmore, Abigail D. Cary and Stephen G. Cary II. He was predeceased by three sisters, Anne (Densmore) Moore, Elizabeth Densmore, Caroline Densmore, and a brother, Edward D. Densmore. The family suggests that Densmore's commitment to community engagement, collaboration and tolerance be noted through gifts to the [Center for Nonviolent Solutions](#), through participation in the [Rules Change Summit](#), or through ongoing acts of civic support.

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