



## Archie A. Van Elslander

October 27, 1930 - February 12, 2018

Birmingham, MI Archie A. Van Elslander, who was known as "Mr. Van" and founded what became one of the largest independent furniture retailers in the United States, passed away on February 12, 2018, at the age of 87, surrounded by his family. Born in 1930 in Detroit, Michigan, Mr. Van Elslander was the son of a Belgian immigrant. He grew up in Detroit, peddling papers and working in his father's bar as a young boy. At age 14, he discovered his love of fashion when he took a job working at a local haberdashery, Square Menswear. After graduating from Denby High School in 1948 and serving in the U.S. Army, Mr. Van Elslander married, started a family and took a job at Gruenwald Furniture. He opened his first store in 1959, the sole proprietor of a 4,000 square foot shop on Gratiot Avenue in East Detroit, and ultimately grew Art Van Furniture to nearly 4,000 associates and over 100 Art Van Furniture locations throughout the Midwest before selling the business in early 2017. A pioneer retailer and master promoter, he was widely respected in the furniture industry for his creative approach to marketing. Mr. Van Elslander's awards and recognitions are many, with his generosity and business acumen regularly acknowledged. With a seemingly limitless capacity for giving, Mr. Van Elslander was one of Michigan's most generous and beloved philanthropists. When Detroit's annual Thanksgiving Day parade was in financial peril in 1990, Mr. Van Elslander made an historic donation that saved this cherished tradition. For the next 25 years, he personally rode in the parade, waving to crowds along the route. He was a major benefactor of countless charities,

including St. John Providence Health System, Focus:HOPE, Forgotten Harvest and the Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order. He leaves behind an indelible print on the hearts of many, and will be sorely missed. Mr. Van Elslander is survived by his ten children: Gary (Janet) Van Elslander, Debra Van Elslander (Roy Kaminski), Sandra Seroka (Doug Olson), Kenneth (Janice) Van Elslander, Lori Webb (the late Michael), Karen (John) Paglino, Kim (John) Francis, Kris (William) Scarfone, David (Susan) Van Elslander, and Beth (Douglas) Wood, as well as his wife, Mary Ann, and his life partner, Sarah Cuyler. He is also survived by 32 grandchildren, 16 great-grandchildren and one great-great grandchild. He is preceded in death by his parents, Achiel and Rose (nee De Munter) Van Elslander, brother Robert Van Elslander, children, Ricky, Randy and Douglas, as well as granddaughters Kyleigh & Kyrsten Webb and Kara Paglino. The family will receive friends at Wujek-Calcaterra Funeral Home in Shelby Township on Wednesday, February 14 from 4-9 pm and Thursday, February 15 from 1-9 pm. Mr. Van Elslander will lie in state at 9:30 am at The Cathedral of the Most Blessed Sacrament in Detroit, with mass at 11:00 am. Memorial donations may be made to The Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order or to Alcoholics Anonymous.

# Tribute Wall

MO

“*True story: I don't know of anyone other than my parents who might know this, but when I was in high school he arranged for me to have the use of his personal car so I could take my date to the senior prom. Public image aside, his gesture showed who he was... even though no one else might ever know about it. That was a big thing for me. Thanks again. I wish him and all of his family, friends, and associates the best.*”

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**Michael Orlando** - February 28, 2018 at 12:00 AM

LB

“*My deepest sympathy goes out to the Van Elslander family. The world has lost a great man! I worked in the design department for about 10 years after graduating from college and I learned so much! It was more like family than co-workers. Some of my fondest memories were working at the Van Elslander house decorating it for Christmas. Mrs. Van was always so sweet and I got to know the younger family members that did not work at the corporate office. I know your hearts will hurt for a long time as will ours. He will always be remembered for the wonderful things he did for the community. What a wonderful legacy to leave behind!*”

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**Linda Benson** - February 16, 2018 at 12:00 AM

MG

“*I want to express my condolences to the Elslander family on the loss of Art Van Elslander. I have many fond memories working for the Art Van Furniture Company starting with the Plymouth Rd. Livonia MI store back in the 80's. Please know that you are in my prayers during this time.*”

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**Michelle Gephart** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

PD

“*Thoughts and prayers to Dave and the Van Elslander family. So sorry for your loss. I have some fond memories of how he treated me both when I was young and also as an adult when I would see him. Always with respect and concern. He was a great caring, loving and giving man. We lost a truly great one. Best wishes to the entire Van family and sincere condolences to you all..*”

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**PAUL DEGRANDE** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

RD

“*My condolences to the family. Mr. Van was truly a "people person" always looking out for what was best in the community. He will be missed.*”

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**Ron D** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

SB

“*i would like to extend my heartfelt sympathy to the Van Eslander family. my husband len and i and our children were very close friends with sandy seroka and her family. i know that he was a very loved father and grandfather. our love goes out to the entire family. sincerely, sue and len bartush*”

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**sue bartush** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

TC

*“I was truly saddened to hear of Mr Van's passing. I remember being a new employee on the sales floor at 14 mile; just 20 years old. One of my first jobs and I was really green. This was back in 1984 or so and I remember Mr Van coming in the side door by the main office. He said hello and I remember to this day how his infectious smile helped put me at ease. I was employed in sales for about 15 years or so and learned a tremendous amount of life skills. I'm very appreciative of having worked for this wonderful caring man. My prayers are with your family.”*

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**Terri Chouinard** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

WL

*“I wish to extend my condolences to the family as well as all the employees that Mr Van leaves behind, working for Art for 18 years I always enjoyed his presence. He was truly loved and admired: Again sorry for your loss”*

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**William Louchart** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

LA

*“Mr. Van did so much for the Detroit community. I was proud to work for his company. What I learned from selling furniture transferred to my teaching career. My prayers and condolences are with the entire Van Elslander family.”*

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**Lorrie Atkinson** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

KG

*“My deepest sympathy goes out to the Van Elslander family. I am heartbroken over the loss of such a great man who meant so much to me and my late husband Len. He touched so many people and changed their lives in a good way and will always be remembered by all with love. Sincerely, Mrs. Leonard Gudenau (Kathy)”*

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**Kathy Gudenau** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

LW

“Mr Van was truly from a motivated generation of dreamers and doers. As a second generation furniture dreamer and a young person calling on Art Van Stores it was always thrilling to get feedback and be inspired by him. He surely knew everyone's name but I always felt worthy of my post each time he recognized me and called me by mine. My condolences to all those who benefitted from his vision and the beautiful legacy of family he leaves behind.”

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**Licia Williams** - February 15, 2018 at 12:00 AM

PA

“We are saddened to hear of the passing of Mr. Van elslander. He was such a good person?Owen/paulineDetroit mi.”

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**Pauline** - February 14, 2018 at 12:00 AM