

## Dave Thomas

Represented by daughter Pam Farber

Dave Thomas was born on July 2, 1932 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. He was raised by his adoptive parents, Rex and Auleva Thomas. He would become a well-known advocate for adoption, founding the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption in 1992.

Thomas first became involved in the restaurant industry at the age of 12, when he got a job as a counterman at the Regas Restaurant in Knoxville. He was fired after a misunderstanding with his boss about his vacation and vowed to never in his life lose another job. At the age of 15, Thomas got a job as a busboy at a Hobby House restaurant in Fort Wayne, Indiana. When his family moved again, he refused, dropping out of high school at age 15 to work full time. He moved in with the family that owned the restaurant and focused on ways to promote it. It was at the Hobby House that he met a waitress named Lorraine who become his wife in 1956.

During the Korean War, he volunteered for the U.S. Army. Having experience in overseeing the feeding of others, Thomas chose Cook and Bakers School at Fort Benning, Georgia. He was sent overseas to Germany as a mess sergeant and was responsible for feeding 2000 soldiers daily. He later attributed his success in fast food to this experience in mass feedings.

On discharge, Thomas was offered a chance to turn around a failing KFC restaurant. He helped save the restaurant and revolutionized the fast food industry by simplifying the menu. Working with KFC founder Col. Harland Sanders, he quit soon after being hired to pursue further dreams. When Thomas was unable to find any good burger establishments in the Columbus area, he started a restaurant of his own. Thomas sold his KFC franchises and opened his first Wendy's in Columbus, Ohio, in 1969. Thomas named the restaurant after his 2-year-old daughter Melinda Lou, whose nickname was Wendy, stemming from the child's inability to say her own name at a young age.

Thomas, realizing that his success as a high school dropout might convince other teenagers to leave school, became a student at Coconut Creek High School. He earned a GED in 1993. He later earned an honorary membership of Duke University's Sigma Phi Epsilon. He was inducted into the Junior Achievement U.S. Business Hall of Fame in 1999. He also earned an Honorary Degree of Laws from Franklin University in 1995.

Thomas died on January 8, 2002 at his home in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, after a decade-long struggle with liver cancer. He was buried in Union Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio. At the time of his death, there were more than 6,000 Wendy's restaurants operating in North America.