

**BORN**

08/27/1935

**DIED**

10/12/2023

## Thomas Owens Obituary

Thomas Franklin Owens, aged 88, passed away on October 12, 2023 at The Arbors of Gulf Breeze, where he had resided since 2018. Tom was born on August 27, 1935, in Montgomery, AL to Wade Thomas Owens and Mae Katherine Hamrick. Growing up in Montgomery, he played baseball, loved motorcycles, and even dabbled in amateur boxing. He graduated from Sidney Lanier High School in 1953, and continued his education at Auburn, officially called Alabama Polytechnic Institute at the time. After graduating from Auburn in 1957 with a BS in Mechanical Engineering, Tom went to work at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, AL for the Thiokol Chemical Corporation, and in November of that year he married the love of his life

Shirley Inez Hatcher at Highland Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery. In early 1958, he took a leave of absence from Thiokol to spend 3 years as a navigator in the U.S. Air Force. While in the service, Tom and Shirley were stationed at various USAF bases, including Tampa, FL and Waco, TX where they welcomed their son Tom into the world in 1958. During their Air Force years, they also became avid bridge players and remained so for many years. After his honorable discharge, Tom and family returned to Huntsville where he resumed his career with Thiokol, and where daughter Ann was born in 1961. Tom continued to work for Thiokol, progressing up the company ladder to eventually lead an engineering team that designed multiple products, including most notably the first stage rocket motor for the "Hellfire" missile which is still in use today by the US Armed Forces. During his life in Huntsville, he enjoyed golfing, tennis, bowling leagues, supporting and coaching youth sports, and the annual family vacations to Panama City, FL. After retiring in 1995, Tom and Shirley moved to Cobb County, outside of Atlanta, GA to be near Tom, Ann, and their families. He was the most loving and dedicated husband imaginable over the next several years, focusing his life on the care of Shirley after she developed early-onset Alzheimer's disease. Tom remained in Georgia for a few more years after Shirley passed, then moved to Gulf Breeze, FL in 2018 to once again be near his son and daughter. Though his health was declining during his time in Gulf Breeze, he never lost his sense of humor: when asked by the family if he needed anything when they returned for the next visit,

his typical answer was "a bucket of money!"

Tom was preceded in death by his father and mother, and by his loving wife of 55 years, Shirley. He is survived by his son Tom (Gigi) Owens and daughter Ann Owens (Mark) Kirby of Gulf Breeze, FL, along with his grandchildren Ashley (Phillip) Butler, Lindsay (Peter) Heldt, Kyle (Ashleigh) Kirby, Drew Kirby, Laura Kirby and great-grandchildren Henley Butler, Reagan Butler, and Avery Heldt.

The family will hold a private memorial service in Georgia, where Tom's ashes will be interred beside Shirley. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the [Alzheimer's Association](#).

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