

## Remembering visionary FedEx Founder Frederick Smith

- A Monitor Report

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Tennessee : Frederick Wallace Smith, the trailblazing founder and longtime leader of FedEx Corporation, passed away on June 21, 2025, in Memphis, Tennessee, at the age of 80. Smith, widely hailed as one of the most influential business innovators of the modern era, transformed the way the world moves goods and information.

### Early life, inspiration

Born August 11, 1944, in Marks, Mississippi, and raised in Memphis, Smith battled a childhood bone disease but overcame it with remarkable determination. At Yale College, he famously wrote a term paper outlining an overnight delivery system designed to meet the demands of an increasingly time-sensitive economy—an idea that would later become the foundation of FedEx.

After graduating in 1966, Smith served with distinction in the US Marine Corps during the Vietnam War, completing two tours and earning the Silver Star, Bronze Star, and two Purple Hearts. His military service shaped his leadership philosophy—discipline, precision, and a belief that logistics could make the difference between failure and success.

### Building global giant

In 1973, Smith launched Federal Express with 14 small aircraft, operating from Memphis International Airport. His vision—that packages could be picked up, flown to a central hub, sorted overnight, and delivered anywhere in the US the next morning—was revolutionary. Critics called it impossible, but Smith proved them wrong.

Under his leadership, FedEx grew from a startup that once struggled to make payroll to a global powerhouse with operations in more than 220 countries and territories, a fleet of nearly 700 aircraft, over 500,000 employees, and the capacity to move 17 million shipments daily. Smith pioneered innovations such as real-time package tracking, the “hub-and-spoke” distribution model, and the “Purple Promise”—the commitment that FedEx employees would make every delivery experience outstanding.

### Philanthropy, public

service

Beyond business, Smith devoted himself to philanthropy, supporting veterans’ causes, education, the arts, and medical research. A long-time supporter of St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital, the University of Memphis, and the Mayo Foundation, he gave generously while often avoiding the spotlight.

Smith also served on numerous boards and councils, including the Business Roundtable, the French-American Business Council, and the US-China Business Council. His insights were sought by policymakers and presidents alike, particularly on trade, transportation, and national security.

### Lasting impact

Smith was preceded in death by his daughter Windland Smith Rice and

is survived by his wife, Diane; nine children; 31 grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. Friends and colleagues remember him as a visionary with a competitive spirit, a quick wit, and an unwavering belief that “the information about the package is as important as the package itself.”

From a college idea to a global institution, Fred Smith’s life story is a testament to bold thinking, relentless execution, and the power of innovation. The next time a package arrives at your door overnight, it will be part of the legacy of a man who reshaped the modern economy—and in the process, connected the world.