

# Thad Seymour Sr., former president of Rollins College, dies at 91



By LISA MARIA GARZA

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Thad Seymour Sr.'s contributions to the community were honored at the Polasek Museum in 2016. (Sarah Espedido / Orlando Sentinel)

Former Rollins College President Thaddeus Seymour Sr., known for his volunteerism and commitment to his community, died Saturday, his family said. He was 91.

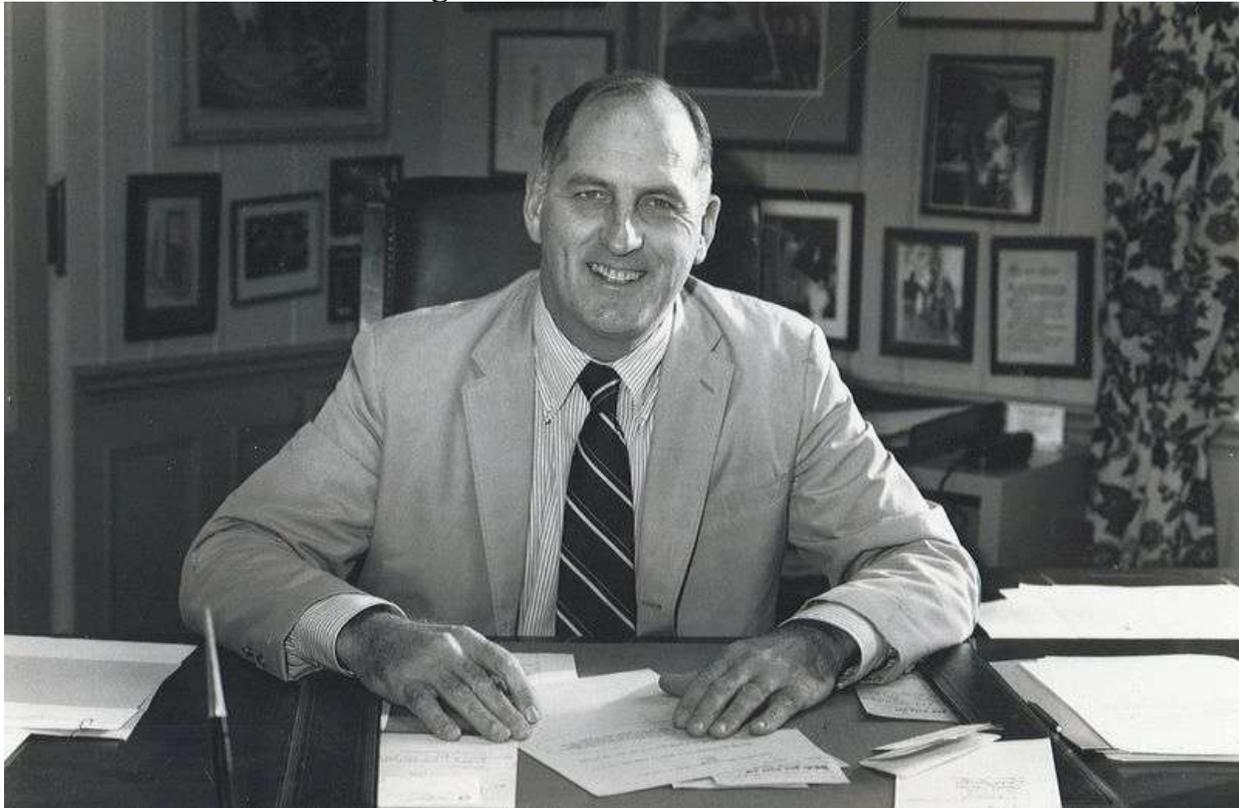
Seymour moved to Winter Park in 1978 with his wife, Polly, and five kids to take the job as the 12th president of Rollins College and served in office for 12 years.

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“He had been declining. It was a very peaceful passing, surrounded by family,” said his son Thaddeus Seymour Jr., the interim president at the University of Central Florida. “At 91, you can’t do better than that.”

Rita Bornstein, who succeeded Seymour as Rollins president in 1990, remembered that he ordered the bells at Knowles Memorial Chapel to chime after her appointment was announced.

“He did what he had to do to pull and push Rollins to be better and better — that’s his legacy,” Bornstein said. “When I came, I built on the things that he had done, the way he had encouraged people, and [Rollins] just grew from there and has continued to grow.”



Thaddeus Seymour Sr. was president of Rollins College from 1978 - 1990.  
(Courtesy of Rollins Archives)

Outside of academia, Seymour was known for his public service within the Winter Park community.

He co-founded the Winter Park-Maitland chapter of Habitat for Humanity in 1990 and served as chairman on the board of directors. The nonprofit

organization's 53rd home built was dedicated to Seymour Sr. and his wife in 2017.

Hal George, president of the local affiliate, said Seymour was a "community treasure," who was always willing to pick up a hammer to help build homes for families in need.

"Every organization has someone that just sort of takes the ball and runs with it and that's been Thad for almost 30 years," George said. "The whole program really blossomed under his leadership."

Born in New York City in 1928, Seymour attended Princeton University and graduated from the University of California at Berkeley. He earned his master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of North Carolina. Before coming to Rollins, Seymour was a former dean at Dartmouth College and the president of Wabash College in Indiana for nine years.

"A lot of people don't know it, but he actually flunked out of college himself," Seymour Jr. said. "I think through that, he learned compassion and every student has his or her own challenges and it's about how you overcome them." Seymour Jr. would later follow in his father's academic leadership footsteps.

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During his tenure at Rollins, Seymour Sr. reinstated Fox Day, a yearly unscheduled holiday before final exams during the spring semester that is signaled with the placement of a fox statue in Tars Plaza. Fox Day had been stopped in 1970 during the Vietnam War.

"The world had grown so grim," Seymour Sr. recalled in a story on the Rollins web site. "I thought we needed to cheer ourselves up."

He was one of the Sentinel Editorial Board's runners-up for Central Floridian of the Year in 2013, and in 2016 Winter Park's mayor declared May 1

"Thaddeus Seymour Day" in the city.

Current Rollins President Grant Cornwell said he appreciated Seymour's "kindness, humor and perspective" when he took office in 2015.

“Thad was a tremendous asset to the college and the Winter Park community,” Cornwell said in a statement. “I am grateful for the work he did as president to position Rollins so well for the future.”



Thaddeus Seymour, former Rollins College president, helped build houses for Habitat for Humanity. (JOHN RAOUX / ORLANDO SENTINEL)

Seymour, an amateur magician, was known to perform for various groups. Multiple graduating classes witnessed his sleight of hand trick at commencement speeches, according to his family.

“I learned early from both my wonderful parents that the magic of the world is hidden in plain sight,” his daughter Liz Seymour wrote Sunday in a public Facebook post. “Last night we lost the magician, but the magic remains.”

I learned early from both my wonderful parents that the magic of the world is hidden in plain sight. Last night we lost the magician, but the magic remains.

Posted by [Liz Seymour](#) ON [Sunday, October 27, 2019](#)

Seymour is survived by Polly, his wife of 71 years, and their four children: Liz, Thaddeus Jr., Sam and Abigail.

The couple's daughter Mary Seymour died in 2015.

A service of remembrance will be held at Knowles Chapel on the Rollins College campus at 2 pm on Nov. 3.

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**Murphy addendum:**

Ten years ago three of us in our class hosted Thad and Polly for a lunch in Winter Park, Florida, after he had retired as President of Rollins College. This trio included Bill Glenn, John Edwards and myself – we had all been roommates at Corey Ford's house in our senior year at Dartmouth, and had gotten together at our home in Windermere, FL for a sort of mini reunion. We had a wonderful time with Thad, reliving some of our adventures from our undergraduate years. I remember our wives heard a few stories that day which they had never known about.



From left to right, we are: Cynthia Edwards, Bill Glenn, Helene Murphy, Thad and Polly Seymour, Mike Murphy, Mardi Glenn, and John Edwards.

Thad was a wonderful, wonderful man. We will miss him greatly. *Ave Atque Vale.*

Mike



### Celebrating a professor, coach, dean, and friend

Dear fellow alumni,

We were all saddened to learn of former dean Thad Seymour's passing on October 26. We recognize and celebrate the impactful contributions Thad made to Dartmouth and the student experience as professor, coach, and dean. "Dad Thad" helped guide thousands of Dartmouth students through particularly tumultuous times as a mentor and friend. He is cherished by many alumni, who experienced firsthand the generosity of his spirit and the magic of his positive influence.

After Dartmouth, Thad went on to successful and meaningful careers as the eleventh president of Wabash College, the twelfth president of Rollins College, and as a committed public servant in his Florida community. A memorial service was held in Florida on November 3. You can find a remembrance of Thad [here](#).

Sincerely,

Cheryl Bascomb '82 P'12

Vice President for Alumni Relations