

Founder of Famous Amos Cookies Passes

Wallace “Wally” Amos Created Empire

(AP) Wallace “Wally” Amos, the creator of the cookie empire that took his name and made it famous and who went on to become a children’s literacy advocate, has died. He was 88.

Amos created the Famous Amos cookie empire and eventually lost ownership of the company — as well as the rights to use the catchy Amos name. In his later years, he became a proprietor of a cookie shop called Chip & Cookie in Hawaii, where he moved in 1977.

He died Tuesday at his home in Honolulu, with his wife, Carol, at his side, his children said. He died from complications with dementia, they said.

“With his Panama hat, kazoo, and boundless optimism, Famous Amos was a great American success story, and a source of Black pride,” said a statement from his children, Sarah, Michael, Gregory and Shawn Amos.

He was married six times to five women, son Shawn said, explaining that he and Carol had split up, reacquainted and then remarried.

They said their dad “inspired a generation of entrepreneurs when he founded the world’s first cookie store” on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles in 1975.

He had been stationed in Hawaii with the Air Force, and Famous Amos gave him the means to later make it his home.

While Wally Amos was a great promoter, he struggled as a businessperson



Wally Amos, of Kailua, Hawaii, is shown in his home office June 12, 2007, in the Lanikai section of Kailua, Hawaii. Amos, the creator of the cookie empire that took his name and made it famous and who went on to become a children’s literacy advocate, has died at age 88, on Tuesday, Aug. 13, 2024. (AP Photo/Lucy Pemoni, File)

and eventually lost control of the company. He walked away from it because he didn’t want to just be its face, Sarah Amos said.

Later losing the business and the right to use his name was deeply painful and personal, Shawn Amos said: “The re-

mainder of his life and the remainder of his professional pursuits were attempts to get him to, you know, reclaim that space.”

Wally Amos was also co-founder of Uncle Wally’s Muffin Co., whose products are found in stores nationwide. But Amos said the fame never really mattered much to him.

“Being famous is highly overrated anyway,” Amos told The Associated Press in 2007.

His muffin company, based in Shirley, N.Y., was originally founded as Uncle Noname Cookie Co. in 1992, a few years after Amos lost Famous Amos, which still widely uses his name on its products.

Amos had said the Famous Amos cookies sold today are unlike his cookies, which had lots of chocolate, real butter and pure vanilla extract.

“You can’t compare a machine-made cookie with handmade cookie,” he told the AP. “It’s like comparing a Rolls Royce with a Volkswagen.”

Uncle Noname, however, floundered because of debt and problems with its contracted manufacturers.

The company filed for bankruptcy in 1996, abandoned cookies and went into muffins at the suggestion of Amos’ business partner, Lou Avignone.

Inside his now-shuttered Hawaii cookie shop, he sold bite-sized cookies similar to the ones he first sold at the Famous Amos Hollywood store.

Amos also was active in promoting reading. His shop, for example, had a reading room with dozens of donated books, and Amos usually spent Saturdays sitting on a rocking chair, wearing a watermelon hat, reading to children.

Amos earned numerous honors for his volunteerism, including the Literacy

Award presented by President George H.W. Bush in 1991.

“Your greatest contribution to your country is not your signature straw hat in the Smithsonian, but the people you have inspired to learn to read,” Bush said.

In one of his books, “Man With No Name: Turn Lemons Into Lemonade,” Amos explained how he lost Famous Amos even before it was sold for \$63 million to a Taiwanese company in 1991. Despite robust sales, by 1985, the business was losing money, so Amos brought in outside investors.

“The new owners gobbled up more of my share until all of a sudden, I found I had lost all ownership in the company I founded,” Amos wrote. Before long, the company had changed ownership four times.

Sarah Amos said that after parting ways with Famous Amos, he stopped baking for about two years. After rediscovering a love of baking, he launched the Hawaii business, Chip & Cookie, in 1991.

Born in Tallahassee, Florida, Amos moved to New York City at age 12 because of his parents’ divorce. He lived with an aunt, Della Bryant, who taught him how to make chocolate chip cookies.

He later dropped out of high school to join the Air Force before working as a mail-room clerk at the William Morris Agency, where he became a talent agent, working with The Supremes, Simon & Garfunkel and Marvin Gaye before borrowing \$25,000 to launch his cookie business.

He was the first Black agent in the business, Shawn Amos, said.

“The first time we made cookies with our kids, it sort of sunk in, this is actually a family thing,” Shawn said. “It’s a gift he gave us. It’s part of our heritage.”

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Self Enhancement, Inc. Announces New CEO

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annually, providing critical resources that enhance every aspect of a student’s life. Over the years, SEI has developed from a youth-serving basketball camp into the largest Black-led human services organization in the State of Oregon. SEI plays a critical role in maintaining Jefferson High School’s presence in the community and now boasts two buildings, five properties used for low-income housing programs, replication of the SEI model in Miami, FL and Atlanta, GA.

Tony’s contributions to education and social entrepreneurship have been widely recognized. He has received numerous awards locally and nationally, including the national “Points of Light” award, Urban League of Portland’s “Equal Opportunity Award,” the Black United Fund’s “Legacy Award,” and the “Distinguished Service Award” from the University of Oregon. He has also been a prominent advocate for underserved youth at national forums such as the Harvard School of Education and the Boston College Education Roundtable. Under his leadership, Self Enhancement, Inc. was the recipient of the federal Promise Neighborhood Initiative grant award of over \$28 million, which

fosters partnerships between students and families, community partners, schools, local government, and businesses.

Tony’s legacy is defined by his relentless passion for addressing the educational and social challenges faced by children of color and those living in poverty. His work has made a profound impact not only in Portland, but also on a national scale. To honor his legacy, the Center for Self Enhancement is being renamed the Tony Hopson, Sr. Center for Self Enhancement.

Trent Aldridge is taking the helm as CEO after a national search through Motus Recruiting and approval from the SEI Board of Directors. Previously serving as SEI’s Chief Program Officer, Trent is an expert in developing potential and is an avid supporter of innovation. For the past 20 plus years, Trent’s accomplishments include leading SEI’s Pamplin Leadership Program, expanding SEI’s SUN community presence from serving four public schools to 18 campuses, and oversight of \$25M+ operating budgets. As Chief Program Officer, Trent directed five departments, 24 service sites, and 225 full- and part-time staff. In addition to his invaluable contributions to SEI as an organization, Trent has mentored hundreds of SEI students and staff, helping them realize their

full potential. Many of his mentees have gone on to become leaders within SEI and in major companies and service organizations across the region.

Trent was raised in Portland, Oregon by a single mother. He attended Portland Public Schools, graduating from Benson High School. He then went on to Portland State University to study Communications and Black Studies. Trent is a devoted family man and tech enthusiast, who learned from his mother, a Portland Public Schools teacher, the importance of pouring into his community.

“I am humbled and honored to continue the incredible legacy that Tony Hopson, Sr. has built,” said Trent Aldridge. “SEI has been a pillar of strength and support in our community, and I am dedicated to furthering our mission and expanding our impact. Together, we will continue to create positive change and provide hope for future generations.”

Tony expressed his confidence in Trent’s leadership, stating, “Trent has been an integral part of SEI’s success. His innovative approach and deep commitment to our mission make him the perfect person to lead SEI into the future. I am excited to see the continued growth and impact of SEI under his leadership.”