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OPINION

EDITORIALS

F. Willard Wall

■ The Porterville entrepreneur leaves a solid legacy of knowing what's important in life.

Before his death on Saturday, F. Willard Wall would have been a perfect customer for Madison Avenue: the largest animal-health products distributor in the world, annual sales of his Walco International exceeding \$330 million.

Oh, what those frisky public-relations kids at Chiat-Day could have done with him. Colts and calves in slow-motion videos, nuzzling children in gingham sun dresses, scampering across verdigris pastures as the camera pans a white Victorian farm house with a lattice gazebo and lace curtains.

The life he could have lived with the real-life likenesses of J.R. Ewing. He admitted that it would have been smart to move to Texas, Kansas or Nebraska, where most of his business was.

But there was just one place in his heart — Porterville. For him, walking through town greeting one's second-grade buddies is something that added depth to character.

As his business grew, that character later was reflected in his philosophy for managing 700 workers: "Take care of your employees. Retain capital to grow. Don't be highly leveraged. Never owe the bank too much. Take risks, but never risk everything. Provide for the long haul. Stay with the core business."

He was a man who stayed at home and managed the family business, while his brother, the adventurer Kermit, sailed around the world on a yacht. Mr. Wall was more likely to get a kick out of serving as grand marshal of the Tulare County Fair. That's not to say he was not an active man. He just preferred to paddle a canoe, he once said, rather than sail a ship.

Mr. Wall, 73 when he died, didn't look at things the way most big-time business folks do. Nepotism, for example, to him was a good thing. He and his wife, Pegge, have seven children and 20 grandchildren. Three of the children work for the company. He used to laugh and say, "That's why we call it a family business."

The value he placed on home, family and employees is what set him apart from most multimillionaire businessmen in America. He was the kind of man who sets an example for the leadership we like to see coming from the Valley: trustworthy, hard-working, honest and unaffected.

"The Valley is a beautiful place," he told a Bee staff writer last year, "When you live in the backwater you have time to reflect on values, on what life is all about."

Friends will gather for a memorial service Friday at 11 a.m. at the First Church of the Nazarene in Porterville to reflect on the gift of knowing and loving the modest Mr. Wall. That's what life's all about.