

Clay Mathile, 1941-2023

Clayton Lee Mathile, known to most simply as Clay, was a successful business owner, visionary leader, impassioned philanthropist, devoted husband, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and friend. He inspired those around him to “dream no little dreams.” Over the course of his life and career, Clay improved the lives of countless people around the world; he found joy in using his energy and resources to change lives through his support of organizations and individuals with big dreams and did so energetically during his professional career as a leader, mentor, and friend.

“I had four dreams in my life. The first was to own my own business, the second was that the business would stand for something. The third was to use my time and money to help entrepreneurs and pay back my mentors, and the fourth was to use technology we utilized at Iams to feed people better than we feed pets.”

— Clay Mathile

Childhood

Born on January 11, 1941, in the rural town of Portage, Ohio, Clay was raised by a farmer and a teacher, Wilbert (Bill) Mathile and Helen Mathile (nee Good) respectively. His childhood was shaped by traditional values; Clay grew up in a family that prized hard work, moral integrity, and belief in the American Dream. That Midwestern work ethic was balanced by his mother’s belief that education was the greatest social and economic equalizer — a mantra that would later shape Clay’s philanthropic philosophy.

Ambitious by nature, Clay learned how different businesses worked in his local community and developed an entrepreneurial spirit at a young age. He excelled in high school as an athlete and student and put himself through college at Ohio Northern University to earn a degree in business in 1962.

Marriage and family

Shortly after graduating, he married MaryAnn Maas Mathile, a decision he proudly said he got right the first time and never looked back. The couple started a family, and, over the years, had five children. Despite his natural aptitude in business and the incredible successes ahead of him, Clay was a family-first man; he prioritized his marriage and family and experienced both as foundational to any success outside of the home.

This focus on family continued as Clay and MaryAnn’s family grew to include not just their children, but their children’s spouses and grandchildren. Today, the four-generation Mathile family continues to prioritize family and togetherness.

Early career

Clay began his professional career by working in accounting at General Motors and then at Campbell Soup Company, both located in northern Ohio. After seven years working at Campbell’s, he took a chance on the recommendation of a friend and met with Paul F. Iams, the founder of Iams Food Company (which would later become The Iams Company). The two businessmen shared a passion for innovation and a spirit of entrepreneurialism.

In 1970, Clay and MaryAnn moved their young family to Dayton so Clay could begin working at Iams. He worked closely with Paul to refine and expand the company’s premium dog food products, experiment with new solutions and operations, and deepen their relationships with pet owners and retailers. In January 1982, Paul retired, and Clay and MaryAnn became sole owners and Clay the CEO of The Iams Company.

Leading Iams

As CEO, Clay empowered a thriving team who was committed to improving the lives of dogs and cats. He aligned them to a mission and vision, armed them with the resources they needed, provided development opportunities through Iams University, and then — trusting and believing in them fully — got out of their way so they could do great work.

When Clay purchased and began leading Iams, he did so with an unyielding commitment to his morals and values learned in childhood: to work hard, do what’s right, be honest, and treat others with dignity and respect. This values-

orientation manifested most meaningfully in a guiding belief system the Iams family still knows today — CCPP: Customer, Culture, Products, People.

Clay led the Iams team to prioritize those four aspects above all else. He was emphatic that Iams' **customers** — cats and dogs around the world — were the company's most important focus and deserved world-class nutrition. Before "**culture**" was part of everyday professional vernacular, Clay took it upon himself to create an environment where employees found meaning in their work, were respected as individuals, and had the resources and freedom to do great work. He led the company to produce the highest quality pet food **products** through world-class manufacturing practices, ingredient integrity, nutrition science leadership, and commitment to continuous improvement. And his respect for **people** led some of the highest-performing teams in the history of pet nutrition and the institution of Iams University, a training and development resource for employees, partners, and customers to grow their knowledge of nutrition science and their business aptitude.

Also vital to Iams' success were the 50 family-owned independent distributors who supplied thousands of retailers, breeders, and veterinarians with Iams products. Under Clay's leadership, the entire supply chain as well as Iams customers — the millions of dog and cat lovers who loyally purchased Iams — were respected as highly valued contributors to Iams' mission.

Giving back with Aileron

After his successful entrepreneurial career, Clay Mathile set out to give back to other business owners the way his mentors had during his journey. Clay wholeheartedly believed that supporting America's small business owners would catalyze a ripple effect that could raise the quality of life for families, communities, and the nation. With great reverence for entrepreneurs and a drive to lift lives, he rallied a trusted team who could build an organization that would prove that theory true.

The result of his vision and the work of his team was Aileron, a nonprofit organization dedicated to developing small business leaders and improving the quality of life in America. At the core of his vision for Aileron was professional management — an approach to running a thriving business for the long-term that Clay himself learned and leveraged at The Iams Company. Professional management impacted Iams, his team, and his life so profoundly that he founded Aileron to be a community and center that supported America's small business owners through professional management.

With the opening of Aileron's 114-acre campus in 2008, a home was established for Aileron's community: a peer network of like-minded business leaders, professional management practitioners, and business advisors and coaches who are passionate about helping small business owners thrive.

For nearly 30 years and counting, Aileron has developed private companies across America and operated sustainably through a blend of Clay and MaryAnn's endowment, customer revenue, and donations. Today, 15,000 business leaders visit Aileron's campus every year to retreat from the day-to-day and focus on the future of their business.

A Legacy of Philanthropy

Clay and MaryAnn Mathile were passionate philanthropists early in their lives; giving back was a cornerstone of their marriage from the start, and together they tithed and donated to charities as they were able. Their focus on giving became part of the Iams culture under Clay's leadership and was formalized in 1987 when the Mathiles founded The Mathile Family Foundation.

Later, after the sale of Iams, the Mathiles viewed serving others as the greatest reward. In total, the Mathiles donated more than \$500 million across development projects, foundations, and organizations they believed would improve lives, families, and communities.

Clay was a passionate and proud Daytonian, and envisioned a future when Dayton is one of America's most livable cities. After the success of Iams, the Mathiles initiated Mathile Community Awards, a giving program that spoke to their

commitment to Dayton and contributed to its economic growth and stability. Over 10 years, they awarded more than \$60 million to projects like 2nd and Main (the center of downtown Dayton), Benjamin & Marian Schuster Performing Arts Center, the YMCA, the Cassano Health Center, and Wright Dunbar Inc.

Clay and MaryAnn also deeply believed in the adage: “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.” They saw education as a gateway to self-sufficiency, financial independence, and lifelong success, and shared a passion for empowering others — particularly underserved communities — with high-quality education. Working side-by-side, they expressed that passion in their financial support of educational institutions — collegiate and K-12 alike — and scholarships, including the Parents Advancing Choice in Education (PACE).

Powered by Clay’s dream to use nutrition science to feed humans as well as we feed animals, the Mathiles co-founded The Mathile Institute for the Advancement of Human Nutrition in 1989. The organization leveraged nutrition science to develop Chispuditos®, a formula-like nutrient-dense food that combats childhood malnutrition. Chispuditos® are currently distributed throughout Central America. The organization continues this meaningful work today and holds a vision to eliminate malnutrition in children ages 6 months to 6 years in Central America by 2030.

As with his for-profit endeavors, Clay approached philanthropy with a keen eye on longevity, investing in people and organizations he believed would create meaningful, lasting change. Today, the effects of his and MaryAnn’s giving continue to change lives locally and globally as MaryAnn, their children, and their grandchildren carry on the family’s legacy of service.