

Kemin Industries Mourns the Loss of Co-Founder R.W. Nelson

Global business visionary, inventor, and philanthropist leaves behind a legacy of improving billions of lives around the world

DES MOINES, Iowa, April 8, 2025 /PRNewswire/ -- R.W. Nelson, co-founder and chairman of the board of Kemin Industries, passed away peacefully at his home in Des Moines, Iowa, on Monday, April 7, 2025, at the age of 98. R.W. was an innovative business leader, a celebrated salesman, an inventor, and a quietly generous philanthropist in central Iowa and around the world.

"We deeply mourn the passing of R.W. – our family patriarch and one of the visionaries behind Kemin. He was beloved by our family, countless customers around the world, and thousands of Kemin employees whose lives he touched for more than six decades," said Dr. Chris Nelson, President and CEO of Kemin Industries and the eldest son of R.W. "He was tirelessly committed to our family, his faith, the community, and was Kemin's most dedicated marketer and sales champion, coming to the office every day for nearly 60 years. While R.W. will be deeply missed by our family and countless people he impacted worldwide, the breadth of his life's work and dedication to servant leadership is to be celebrated."

Rolland Wade "Bud" Nelson was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on February 28, 1927. At the age of seven, he moved to Des Moines, Iowa, where he lived for the rest of his life. A proud graduate of Dowling Catholic High School and Drake University, R.W. and his wife, Mary Nelson, created Kemin Industries in Des Moines in 1961, using \$10,000 in savings and their family's living room as an office while raising five young children. Their entrepreneurial spirit led to the launch of a new company focused on bringing innovation to the agricultural industry in the Midwest.

From those humble beginnings, R.W. helped guide Kemin's development to become a global leader in innovative ingredients. Today, the multinational, family-owned and operated B2B company supplies over 500 specialty ingredients for human and animal health and nutrition, pet food, aquaculture, nutraceuticals, food technologies, crop technologies, textiles, biofuels, and animal vaccine industries. Its footprint spans six continents, serving customers in more than 120 countries with operations in 90 countries, including manufacturing facilities in Belgium, Brazil, China, India, Italy, San Marino, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States.

A celebrated innovator and industry leader, R.W. held four patents and was recognized worldwide for his scientific discoveries and business achievements. He received citations from two presidents: the President's "E" Certificate for Exports from President Nixon in 1971, and the President's "E" Star Award for Excellence in Export from President Carter in 1978. R.W. also received the U.S. Department of Commerce's Export Award in 1972, the State of Iowa Economic Impact Award in 1987, the Ernst and Young Entrepreneur Achievement Iowa Award in 1991, and the Iowa Biotechnology Association's Entrepreneur Achievement Biotechnology Award in 2004. He was inducted into the Iowa Business Hall of Fame in 2006.

R.W. was a servant leader who built Kemin on a foundation of social responsibility and a belief that the company has a moral obligation to improve the quality of life and the communities where it operates. Throughout the years, R.W. and Mary quietly became transformative philanthropic leaders in Iowa and across communities worldwide. For decades, they supported hundreds of organizations and contributed significantly to many in central Iowa, including Dowling Catholic High School, Drake University, Living History Farms, Iowa State University, The Science Center of Iowa, and a variety of other organizations focused on science and general education, affordable housing, and disaster relief. They opened the Kemin Primary School in China, helped rebuild a fishing community in India after a tsunami, and sent Kemin teams to Nepal and Brazil for Habitat for Humanity global builds. As humble recipients of numerous recognitions and awards, they were especially honored to receive the 2019 Robert D. Ray Iowa SHARES Humanitarian Award for their dedication to outreach in remote parts of distant countries affected by devastating natural disasters.

R.W. served on dozens of boards and committees for industry trade groups, banks, the American Institute of Entrepreneurs, Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, Drake University, private primary and secondary schools in the Des Moines Diocese, and the Greater Des Moines Committee. He was a strong advocate and industry member of the American Chemical Society and the American Feed Industry Association. He supported Kemin's long-term partnerships with the World Food Programme, Habitat for Humanity, and Ellipses.

A Dowling Catholic High School graduate, R.W. received a Bachelor of Arts degree in biology and chemistry from Drake University. He served in the U.S. Army Air Corps from 1945 to 1947 and was honorably discharged as a corporal. He earned service ribbons while deployed to the Philippines at the close of World War II.

R.W. is survived by his wife, Mary, and their children, Christopher (Linda), Elizabeth "Libby," Janet (Georgia), David (John), and Molly; thirteen grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren. R.W. was preceded in death by his parents, Barton and Lillian Nelson, and siblings Barton Nelson Jr, Donald Nelson, Thomas Nelson, Dolores Nelson Stall, and Daniel Nelson. Funeral arrangements will be announced soon. In lieu of flowers, the Nelson family asks that memorials be directed to The Harkin Institute at Drake University and the science and athletic programs at Dowling Catholic High School.

For additional information and funeral updates, visit www.kemin.com.

About Kemin Industries

Kemin Industries (www.kemin.com) is a global ingredient manufacturer that strives to sustainably transform the quality of life every day for 80 percent of the world with its products and services. The company supplies over 500 specialty ingredients for human and animal health and nutrition, pet food, aquaculture, nutraceutical, food technologies, crop technologies, textiles, biofuels, and animal vaccine industries.

For over half a century, Kemin has been dedicated to using applied science to address industry challenges and offer product solutions to customers in more than 120 countries. Kemin provides ingredients to feed a growing population with its commitment to the quality, safety, and efficacy of food, feed, and health-related products.

Established in 1961, Kemin is a privately held, family-owned-and-operated company with more than 3,500 global employees and operations in 90 countries, including manufacturing facilities in Belgium, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Italy, San Marino, Singapore, South Africa, and the United States.

Media Contact:

Lauren M.G. Burt, Head of Global Corporate Affairs, lauren.burt@kemin.com, +1 (515) 249-4219

© Kemin Industries, Inc. and its group of companies 2025. All rights reserved.®™ Trademarks of Kemin Industries, Inc., U.S.A.

Certain statements, product labeling and claims may differ by geography or as required by government requirements.

SOURCE Kemin Industries

Additional assets available online:  [Photos \(1\)](#)

<https://news.kemin.com/2025-04-08-Kemin-Industries-Mourns-the-Loss-of-Co-Founder-R-W-Nelson>