Eugene C. Gwaltney, Jr., is a visionary, a dreamer, a true believer. This former Chairman and CEO of Russell Corporation was often called the industry maverick because of his unique, visionary approach to business. Never afraid to venture into the unknown, he would quickly turn a deaf ear to those who claimed “it can’t be done.”

A native of Rock Hill, South Carolina, Gwaltney received his B.S. degree in Mechanical Engineering in 1940 from Georgia Tech. He then attended M.I.T. until being called into service for his country in 1941. After serving four years in the Army Corps of Engineers, he began a career that would span the technical and manufacturing advances of four decades.

Prior to joining Russell Corporation in 1952, Mr. Gwaltney worked for several businesses, including Burlington Mills, the Arlind Corporation, and Robert and Company. He then joined Russell as Director of Research and Quality Control, thus beginning the rise to the pinnacle of his profession.

Five years after joining Russell, Gwaltney was promoted to General Superintendent. Responsible for the company’s modernization program, he aggressively began upgrading all equipment and plants. He became Vice President in 1960, President and CEO in 1972, and Chairman and CEO in 1982, the position he held until retirement in April 1993. During his tenure, the company was transformed from a regional textile corporation into a Fortune 400 Company.

Under Gwaltney’s leadership, Russell achieved many industry “firsts.” These include a knit fabric that exceeded U.S. Commerce Department flammability tests and NuBlend, a no-pill 50% cotton/50% polyester fleece fabric. Another, which was the first in the United States, was the building of their state-of-the-art open-end spinning plant in 1973. Open-end spinning is now considered the norm for producing yarn.

In June of 1990, Textile World Magazine chose Russell Corporation as the “Model Mill.” In an interview with Gwaltney, he was asked, “How do you create a climate to get people to experiment with new technology, new ways of doing things?” “Get out in that plant, roll up your sleeves and say ‘Hey, we can make this thing go’” was his simple response.

In October 1991, the first yarn was produced at the Wetumpka Spinning Plant, which, as noted by Gwaltney, was built for the “purpose of producing the finest yarn in the world.” Upon his retirement in 1993, this newest of Russell Corporation’s high-tech spinning plants was dedicated to him and renamed the Gwaltney Spinning Plant.

Always active in civic and community affairs, Gwaltney is a firm believer in education. He has served as a trustee of Birmingham-Southern College and of Tuskegee Institute, as well as the Georgia Tech Foundation and as member of the Georgia Tech Advisory Board. He was a director of the Alabama Textile Education Foundation. His many honors include an MIT Corporate Leadership Award in 1976, Textile Man of the Year in 1982 by the New York Board of Trade, and two honorary Law degrees, one from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and one from Birmingham Southern College. He was inducted into the Alabama Business Hall of Fame in 1991.

Since retirement, Mr. and Mrs. Gwaltney, the former Nancy Russell, enjoy traveling and spending time with their children and grandchildren.