James Tracy O’Rourke, Jr., a 1956 mechanical engineering graduate of Auburn University, has been a leader in the development of plant automation in the United States. His dedicated work has helped to create efficient plants and factories needed to boost U.S. productivity in the world market. As chairman and chief executive officer of Varian Associates, Inc., Mr. O’Rourke heads an international Fortune 500 electronics company with sales of well over $1 billion annually. Headquartered in Palo Alto, California, Varian Associates is one of a handful of post-war high-technology firms that formed the nucleus of California’s Silicon Valley. Today the company is a major producer of components and equipment for health-care, communications, scientific, industrial, and defense markets worldwide. It has offices throughout the U.S. and in Australia, Canada, Europe, and the Far East.

Mr. O’Rourke has successfully automated a number of Varian’s factories, and he led the company in its development and installation of what has been recognized as the first small-parts assembly plant to be totally automated, from order entry to the shipment of the product. O’Rourke is originally from Columbia, South Carolina, but he graduated from Murphy High School in Mobile. Following three years as a first lieutenant in the Air Force, his engineering and management career began when he went to work for Du Pont as a marketing development specialist. In 1962, he joined Liquid Nitrogen Processing Corporation, serving in many capacities including vice-president of marketing/ research and development, vice-president and corporate general manager, and, finally, president and chief executive officer.

After ten years with Liquid Nitrogen Processing Corporation, Mr. O’Rourke was named general manager of the Carborundum Company, a position he held until 1976, when he was made the firm’s vice-president and general manager. That same year, he joined Chemtron Corporation as group vice-president, next becoming executive vice-president. In 1978, Mr. O’Rourke signed on as vice-president of corporate development for Allen-Bradley, which would soon be acquired by Rockwell International, and advanced steadily through the company’s executive ranks to become president and CEO in 1986. He held this position until March 1990, also serving during his final two years with Allen-Bradley as corporate vice-president and director of Rockwell. In March 1990, Mr. O’Rourke was named Varian’s chairman and chief executive officer.

Mr. O’Rourke has lectured worldwide at universities and at trade association- and government-sponsored meetings on the topics of quality, computer integrated manufacturing, and global competitiveness. His numerous awards of merit include the International Industrialist of the Year award from the Society of Manufacturing Engineers, and the state of Wisconsin’s Governor’s Award for support of the arts.

Mr. O’Rourke is married to the former Lou Ann Turner. They live in Palo Alto, California, and have one son, James Tracy O’Rourke III.