

Former Grand Prix chief Ron Walker dies



The Age

Melissa Cunningham & Rachael Dexter

9 hrs ago



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© Joe Castro Ron Walker

Former Grand Prix supremo and Melbourne lord mayor Ron Walker has died.

The millionaire businessman and former Fairfax Media chairman had been battling cancer and ill health for several years after he was diagnosed with a melanoma in 2011.

Mr Walker made headlines when he flew to America for treatment with a drug known as Keytruda, then still in clinical trials.

Following his treatment, he told Fairfax Media in 2015: "I don't want to die, I still have things to do."



© Josh Robenstone Ron Walker

Mr Walker then became a crusader for other cancer victims, lobbying for access to life-saving drugs and improving access to new-generation cancer therapies caught up in red tape.

And after a long campaign, Keytruda was approved for use in Australia and given federal government funding in 2016.

Mr Walker retired as chairman of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation in 2015 after a 22-year stint.

The high profile Melbourne businessman was an AC (Companion of the Order of Australia) and was Melbourne's 2006 Commonwealth Games Corporation chairman.

He became a prominent Liberal Party figure, working as national treasurer of the party from 1987 to 2002.

His relationship with former Victorian premier Jeff Kennett helped him to become the chairman of the Australian Grand Prix Corporation.

He helped deliver Melbourne the hosting rights for the event from Adelaide in 1993.

In 1976 partnered with another Melbourne businessman, Lloyd Williams, and the pair formed the property development company Hudson Conway, which developed the Crown Casino complex in Melbourne.

He also served as the Lord Mayor of Melbourne from 1974 to 1976.

On behalf of Fairfax Media, chairman Nick Falloon said: "Our thoughts are with Ron's family and friends. A past chairman of Fairfax, he made a great contribution to corporate Australia and was a generous philanthropist.

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull described Mr Walker as "a great Australian, magnificent Melburnian and ferociously committed Liberal".

"Ron was a wise and true friend to me as he was to so many Liberal leaders," he wrote on Twitter.

"We will not see his like again. Our hearts go out to Barbara and their family at this sad time."

Friend and former prime minister Tony Abbott also posted a tribute to Mr Walker on Twitter on Tuesday evening.

"Australia, Victoria and Melbourne have lost a great son with Ron Walker's passing. For decades, not much happened in Melbourne without Ron being at the centre of things," he wrote.

"As well, he was a great supporter of good causes, from medical research to the Liberal Party, which he helped to keep together in tough times."

"He was a staunch friend and constant encouragement to successive Liberal leaders and will be much missed."

Fellow entrepreneur Harold Mitchell told Sydney radio station 2GB his friend "was an absolute builder in everything," noting his involvement in establishing Crown casino.

"He and Lloyd Williams, they took a swamp - which is what it was - they convinced the government of the day, Jeff Kennett to do it [build Crown]. That was a brave thing to do"

He also said Walker "took a lot of heat" over the Grand Prix in Melbourne.

"This is a tragedy," he said. "It's so sad. I saw him two, three times a year, and he was looking more frail, but he was a fighter. What a life, what an incredible man."

"He was very generous of his time, I can still recall the last time, might have been a month ago, that I was with him,"

"[He was] still happy to talk and you could see the pain that he must have been in."

Victorian Opposition Leader Matthew Guy also tweeted his condolences.

"Ron Walker loved Melbourne and Victoria," he wrote.

"His generosity touched many. His achievements helped put Victoria on the map. Australia is poorer for Ron's passing. My condolences to Barbara and all of his family."

Federal Opposition Leader Bill Shorten also echoed Mr Walker's contribution to Melbourne.

"Vale Ron Walker, a man of big ideas and great generosity," he tweeted. "Modern Melbourne owes much to his vision and drive."

Mr Walker was 78 years old.

He is survived by his wife Barbara, three children and three grandchildren.



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Fairfax Media



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Fairfax Media statement on the passing of Ron Walker:

8:28 PM - Jan 30, 2018

2 7 8



Tony Abbott
@TonyAbbottMHR

Australia, Victoria and Melbourne have lost a great son with Ron Walker's passing. For decades, not much happened in Melbourne without Ron being at the centre of things. 1/2



Tony Abbott

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As well, he was a great supporter of good causes, from medical research to the Liberal Party, which he helped to keep together in tough times. He was a staunch friend and constant encouragement to successive Liberal leaders and will be much missed. 2/2

6:31 PM - Jan 30, 2018

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Bill Shorten

@billshortenmp

Vale Ron Walker, a man of big ideas and great generosity. Modern Melbourne owes much to his vision and drive.

7:31 PM - Jan 30, 2018 · Melbourne, Victoria

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