

Sunday Telegram - Obituary
August 25, 2002

William J. O'Brien, 69

SOUTHBORO—William J. O'Brien, 69, of Southboro, retired chief executive officer of Hanover Insurance Co., died Saturday, Aug. 24, at home after a struggle with cancer.

He leaves his wife of 39 years, Catherine "Kay" (Kelaheer) O'Brien; a daughter, Kathleen O. Pagano of Worcester; two sons, William V. O'Brien of Brookline and Christopher J. O'Brien of Boston; five grandchildren. He was born in Yonkers, N.Y., son of Vincent and Margaret (Schaeper) O'Brien. He graduated from St. Cecelia's High School, Englewood, N.J., and Fordham University, Bronx, N.Y. He served in the Army from 1954 to 1956.

Mr. O'Brien entered the insurance industry with SAFECO in 1956. He also worked for Security Insurance of Hartford, and Glens Falls Insurance Co. He joined Hanover Insurance in 1971, and from 1979 to 1991, was chief executive officer of the company, which was headquartered in Worcester. While he was CEO, Hanover moved from the bottom of the insurance industry to the top quartile, and was included in a 1994 study by McKinsey & Co. as one of the top 10 underwriting companies in the industry. His efforts in refining corporate vision, values and a sense of common purpose led to a series of booklets that set forth the company's work philosophy. After retiring, he helped other organizations in leadership techniques. He was a founding member of the board of governors of the MIT Center for Organizational Learning, a founding partner of Generon Consulting, and a consultant to the Covenant Group. He served on the board of directors of Shawmut bank, Worcester, NStar Corp., Claims Outsource Inc. and Blue Cod Technologies. He was past president of the Worcester Economic Club, and was the founding chairman of Adopt-A-Student, which raises money for children to attend Worcester Diocese Catholic schools. He was a member of St. Matthew Church.

The funeral will be held at 10 a.m. Wednesday, Aug. 28, in St. Matthew Church, 105 Southville Road. Burial will be in Rural Cemetery. Calling hours are 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, Aug. 27, in St. Morris Funeral Home, 40 Main St. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Worcester Diocese Adopt-A-Student Program, 49 Elm St., Worcester, MA 01609; or to Worcester VNA Care Hospice, 120 Thomas St., Worcester, MA 01608.