

# Robert E. Griffin, Longtime Escalade CEO and Chairman, Has Passed Away at Age 89

PRESS RELEASE • APR 17, 2024 15:00 EDT

He Built the Foundation and Set the Course for Escalade's Success and Leaves his Legacy as a Sporting Goods Visionary, Proponent of Education, and Advocate for a Healthy Active Lifestyle

**EVANSVILLE, Ind., April 17, 2024 (NewsWire.com) -**

Robert E. Griffin, former CEO and Chairman of Escalade, Inc. passed away in St. George, Utah, surrounded by his family on Friday, March 22, 2024, at the age of 89.

Mr. Griffin was instrumental in transforming Escalade into the highly regarded sporting goods and recreation products company that it is today. Leading Escalade for fifty-three years in various roles, and later as unpaid advisor to anyone seeking his wise counsel, Griffin recognized the importance of diversifying the company and product offerings from an established archery-equipment business to a multi-category industry leader. During Bob's steady and visionary leadership, the company grew its sporting goods business from sales of \$800,000 in 1962 to sales of \$155,000,000 in 2015. Griffin commented on Escalade's success: "We learned early on that the demand for sporting goods is very seasonal, and the popularity of certain items runs in cycles. There are ups and downs you can't control, so we began broadening our product base to make sure that all of our eggs were not in one basket." Escalade's reputation for quality products, lead



brands, dedicated employees, and sound business practices stems from his vision, ethics, and leadership.

Griffin was a humble, generous, and faithful friend who maintained close relationships throughout his life. He was a life-long learner who balanced his daily rituals with calculated risk-taking and certitude. One of Bob's mottos was "Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something." His successes outweighed his failures.

"Without Bob Griffin none of us would be here today. I cannot begin to recount the many contributions Bob made to our company, to our industry, and to our communities. He was a modern-day renaissance man: visionary, businessman, teacher, philanthropist, athlete," says Escalade Sports CEO & President Walt Glazer.

Griffin, born and raised in East St. Louis, Illinois, trained in the Naval Reserve Officers Training Corps at the University of Notre Dame, where he earned a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering in 1957. After serving as an officer in the Navy's Civil Engineer Corps, Bob went on to earn a Master of Business Administration from The Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University in 1960. Following graduation, Griffin aspired to work for a company in which he could develop an ownership stake. Bob placed a small advertisement in the Wall Street Journal seeking an opportunity and stating, "equity ownership is more important than salary." That ad piqued the interest of Robert Orr, future Indiana Governor, who was an early venture capitalist and investor in Evansville; the two hit it off right away. In 1962, Griffin had the opportunity to "live what he talked about" when he and a group of investors, including Orr, purchased Indian Archery and Toy Company. In 1973, Escalade, Inc. was formed with The Williams Manufacturing Company merger, and Griffin rolled his ownership stake into this new company, which began trading on the NASDAQ that year. He was appointed as Chief Executive Officer of Escalade in 1976 and continued in that role until 1999. He retired as Chairman of the Board in 2015. After retiring, Bob maintained his iconic office overlooking Maxwell Avenue and continued to greet everyone by name with a hospitable "Good Morning."

Griffin valued education, believing that it led to an improved quality of life and helped people make better decisions. He became a major benefactor to the University of Southern Indiana. In 2014, his leadership gift funded the construction of the USI Griffin Center. Bob continued to engage with his undergraduate alma mater and regularly attended Notre Dame football games. He supported the Center for Citizenship & Constitutional Government, as well as the de Nicola Center for Ethics and Culture. Bob

was instrumental in the launch and support of the Galvin Science & Engineering Scholars program at Notre Dame.

Griffin remained physically active throughout his life and developed a keen interest in health care. His lifelong interest in skiing began in Aspen, Colorado in the 1960s, and he later shifted to Utah. He worked out regularly at the YMCA and enjoyed bicycling. He could be seen tooling around town on his vintage black Indian Scout bicycle. Among his proudest achievements was to introduce the first health risk-based insurance incentive program in the United States at Escalade.

Griffin was an accomplished investor and remained actively interested in the markets. Bob learned about stocks in high school and gained early boardroom experience when he engineered the sale of Obear-Nester Glass Company in 1967. Bob's friend and Evansville restaurateur, Andy Guagenti, identified Wendy's as a significant new franchise opportunity. Griffin and Guagenti set up a meeting with Wendy's founder Dave Thomas, secured the Utah territory, and formed a rewarding partnership in 1975 that built, owned, and operated more than two dozen Wendy's restaurants throughout the state. In 1991, Bob also led Escalade's successful investment in the renowned Swedish table tennis company Stiga Sports, and he developed a long-standing relationship with the Bandstigen family, partners in the business. Most recently, Bob was an investor in Regency Properties and served on their Board of Managers. Regency develops commercial real estate in county seats throughout the United States. Griffin thought of his philanthropy not as a donation, but as an investment that should be leveraged to provide a compelling return to the community.

Griffin was highly active in the Evansville community and received many awards for his service. In 2003, USI recognized his leadership and service with conferral of an Honorary Doctorate degree. He was elected to Evansville's Business Hall of Fame in 2008. Last year, Bob and Judith, his wife of 59 years, were recognized with the Dr. William Wooten Champions of Youth First Award.

He is survived by his wife Judith; daughters Robin, Molly, and Amanda; son Patrick; brother Richard; eleven grandchildren; and many extended family members.

Griffin will be deeply missed by his family, the Escalade family, and those he met, mentored, and inspired throughout his life. Visitation will be held on April 19th at Ziemer Funeral Home East Chapel in Evansville, Indiana. A Mass of Christian Burial will take place on April 20th at St. John the Baptist Catholic Church in Newburgh, Indiana.

## ABOUT ESCALADE

Founded in 1922, and headquartered in Evansville, Indiana, Escalade designs, manufactures, and sells sporting goods, fitness, and indoor/outdoor recreation equipment. Our mission is to connect family and friends creating lasting memories. Leaders in our respective categories, Escalade's brands include Brunswick Billiards®; STIGA® table tennis; Accudart®; RAVE Sports® water recreation; Victory Tailgate® custom games; Onix® pickleball; Goalrilla™ basketball; Lifeline® fitness; Woodplay® playsets; and Bear® Archery. Escalade's products are available online and at leading retailers nationwide. For more information about Escalade's many brands, history, financials, and governance, please visit [www.escaladeinc.com](http://www.escaladeinc.com).

Source: Escalade Inc.

## RELATED MEDIA





## TAGS

escalade inc.    escalade sports    evansville

## ABOUT ESCALADE SPORTS

@ [www.escaladeinc.com](http://www.escaladeinc.com)

Escalade Sports  
817 Maxwell Avenue