By [Chris Green](#)
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Former Rockford College President John Howard dies at age 93

"... the family with its daily affirmative influence on the child is the most reliable nursery of responsible, emotionally mature and socially compatible individuals. The family is also far more effective than any other agency in training new generations in the virtuous conduct required to sustain a republic. The family is the breeding ground for both the good life and the good society."

— Dr. John A. Howard, from a speech delivered Oct. 9, 2002, to a James Madison Center Symposium at Princeton University.

ROCKFORD — Martha Manning skipped church on Aug. 2. Instead, she and her sister, Katie, picked up their father, Dr. John Howard, from Wesley Willows and took him to Klehm Arboretum and Botanic Garden.

"We brought him to (Pond Garden), a popular spot for weddings. We brought our hymnals, and we sat and sang hymns. We sung 'How Great Thou Art' and several other songs. It was a tremendous day. When we left, my sister and I knew it was our last outing with him."

Howard died Friday of natural causes. He was 93.

John Howard RRSTAR.COM FILE PHOTO

The title in front of his name was doctor, but he was known as a patriot, war hero, philosopher, Rockford College president, Rockford Institute founder, author, and advocate for religious and family values.

A devout Christian, Howard was born in Evanston, but spent many summers in Rockford visiting his grandparents, Charles and Mary Sackett. After graduating in 1939 from North Shore Country Day School in Winnetka, Howard studied for three years at Princeton before serving in Europe with the U.S. Army in World War II, earning two Silver Stars and two Purple Hearts. He was also awarded a battlefield commission, a promotion given to enlisted soldiers for outstanding leadership on the field of battle.

Howard returned to Illinois to resume his education, earning his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from Northwestern University. He spent eight years at Palos Verdes College in Southern California, starting as an instructor and becoming its president at the age of 29.

In 1960, Howard began a 17-year tenure as Rockford College president, during which he oversaw the move of the campus from downtown to East State Street. He made the college a center of discussion, often bringing in internationally known speakers, among them Ronald Reagan, who went on to become a good friend.

He was appointed to President Dwight Eisenhower's Committee on Government Contracts, which desegregated the way government contracts were handed out, and he served on the National Commission on Marijuana and Drug Abuse.

Upon retiring from Rockford College (now named Rockford University), Howard founded and became president of the Rockford Institute, a nonprofit "think tank" devoted to conservative family and religious issues.

"There was not a phony bone in his body," said Allan Carlson, a former president of the Institute hired by Howard. "The guy was a true patriot. He had the best virtues of the greatest generation."

Howard also was co-founder of the World Congress of Families and a senior fellow of the Howard Center for Family, Religion & Society, which is named in his honor.

Beyond the titles, Manning said, Howard was the "best father and just a special, special man."

"Dad was always cheerful and funny, and he was clever and quick in spite of the dementia."
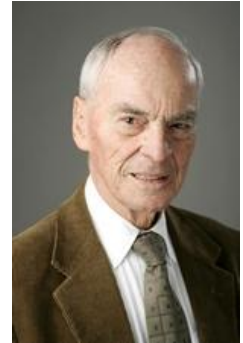
A 1981 plane crash left Manning with severe burns and required her to travel frequently with her father to Rochester, Minnesota, for treatment. It was a difficult time she endured with the help of her father.

"Dad and I spent a lot of time together."

In addition to Manning, Howard is survived by his wife, Janette; two other daughters, Marie Schroeder and Katie Drerup; and one son, Steve Howard.

The funeral will be held at 11 a.m. Aug. 29 at Westminster Presbyterian Church, 2821 N. Bell School Road.

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