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Friends, family remember businessman George Riedmann for his words of wisdom, his giving nature **By Betsie Freeman / World-Herald staff writer**

With a perpetual smile and a pithy phrase, George Riedmann could be as effervescent as the pop he distributed through his century-old Willow Springs Bottling Co.

“You could never catch him without a grin and a glint in his eye,” said granddaughter Nicole Bourquin of Omaha, who works for the family business, now known as Cornhusker Beverage Mart. “He always had a way to get his point across without hurting anybody’s feelings.”

For example, she said, here’s a “grandpa-ism” directed at a grandson who needed a shave: “A peach is good with lots of fuzz, but a man’s no peach and never was.”

Family and friends will remember Riedmann’s words of wisdom, his giving spirit and his business expertise. The 87-year-old lifelong Omahan died June 10 at the Nebraska Medical Center, days after losing control of his car and hitting a wall.

He may have suffered a stroke, said son-in-law Jim Sobczyk of Omaha.

Riedmann graduated from South High School and served in the Navy. After that, he took over the family business from his father, who, with Riedmann's grandfather, had converted the Willow Springs distillery — dating back to the 1860s — to a brewery.

The brewery made beer until Prohibition, then changed to soft-drink production, Sobczyk said. At one time, it bottled Orange Crush, Dr Pepper and Squirt.

When his father retired and sold the rights to those brands, Riedmann didn't want to get out of the beverage business, so he acquired the name of the company and got Omaha's first Dad's Root Beer franchise, said Sobczyk, who now operates the business.

Riedmann bought the company's current property at 85th and K Streets and added a retail store. And under him, the company also mixed and bottled 24 flavors of Goody Pop.

Now, Bourquin said, the company still operates under the Willow Springs incorporation, making it among the oldest businesses in the city. But it no longer has a bottling operation, concentrating on the retail Cornhusker Beverage Mart. In addition to catering drinks for weddings and other events, it also sells home beer-making equipment and has a bridal invitation department.

The company is carrying on Riedmann's legacy, she said: "He was just an outstanding person and the hardest worker I'll ever know."

Riedmann also loved gardening. He kept up the grounds around Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church and was known to show up at the homes of family and friends to pull weeds or even plant trees they didn't know were coming.

And, said Bourquin, he gave turkeys, hams, flowers and pastries to people who helped him — such as an auto mechanic or a nurse.

"That was his way," she said. "He liked to repay."

Other survivors include daughters Margie Sobczyk, Jayne Mollner, Kathleen Kemler and Francie Weis; sister Irene Van Moorlehem; and brothers Alfred and Lou, all of Omaha; 20 other grandchildren; and 23 great-grandchildren.

His wife, Elizabeth, died in 2012 after 64 years of marriage.

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