

# William Johnston Armfield, IV '56

Madison Throwing Company—What would people do at such a place? Throw what?

In 1939, William Johnston Armfield IV—Billy Armfield—was a tike throwing rubber balls, but his dad, Armfield III '29, was involved in another kind of throwing, a kind that was to unite a young Carolina graduate, Dalton McMichael '38, in a lifetime partnership with Armfield, rewarding to both families and to Carolina. The elder Armfield, himself a Carolina grad, was general manager of Burlington Mills' hosiery division in those days, where McMichael got his first job, "throwing" silk yarns—that is, running them through a machine that twisted them so they could be woven into stockings.

With World War II's introduction of synthetic textile materials, such as nylon, Armfield and McMichael anticipated the direction of the industry's future, founding Madison Throwing in 1946. The company prospered and gathered within its fold a corps of highly capable men, who were able to sustain the company after Armfield died in 1956, just about the time that Billy was graduating from Carolina with a degree in business.

After a post-graduation stint in the Army, Billy came to Madison Throwing, working as a machine operator and an administrative assistant and a sales manager—and in the meantime earning a master's degree from the Harvard Business School. By 1970, McMichael and Billy Armfield were president and vice president, respectively of Madison Throwing, when Burlington Industries acquired the company.

It was time again for McMichael and an Armfield to form a textile company, and the result was the Macfield Texturing Company. Texturing? That's twisting, heating, untwisting, and heating the yarn again, giving it a certain bloom and bulk—a certain texture—very much like throwing the old silk yarn back in those pre-war days at Burlington.

Macfield quickly became recognized in the industry as one of the very most efficient processors of polyester yarn. Four years after its founding, it employed 3,200 people. In 1991, ATI magazine named it their company of the year, citing such innovative practices as the company's \$500 bonus to employees who completed high school equivalency programs. That year, Macfield merged with Unifi, Inc., creating a Fortune 500 organization with manufacturing plants in North Carolina, throughout the United States, and in Ireland and France, one of the world's largest texturizers and dyers of polyester and nylon filament fibers.

The McMichael-Armfield connection paid huge dividends for Carolina in 1987. One October evening that year, Dalton McMichael came to Chapel Hill for what he had been led to believe was a planning meeting for Carolina's MBA program. It was, in fact, a

surprise celebration to announce the \$1 million endowment of the Dalton L. McMichael Professorship in the School of Business Administration, a gift to our University from his friends, most notably Billy Armfield.

Billy's generosity—and his skill in getting others to join in the gift—did not go unnoticed, of course, and in 1990, Billy was tapped to join Hugh McColl as co-chairman of the Bicentennial Campaign for Carolina. That campaign benefited not only by Billy's persuasive efforts but also by his—and his wife Jane's—direct gift of \$1 million to support the business school, the school of social work, and other academic purposes. His efforts in that campaign joined a long list of other work in service to Carolina, in the Educational Foundation, on the Board of Visitors, as vice-chairman of the Board of Trustees, and as benefactor on many other occasions. For example, a reception room on the fourth floor of the George Watts Hill Alumni Center is a gift from Billy and Jane Armfield. In 1992 the Board of Trustees presented him its highest honor, the William Richardson Davie Award.

Billy Armfield has thrown yarn through machines, he has thrown textile companies to the top of the industry, and he has thrown Carolina a generous measure of his talent, his time, and his treasure.