Gordon S. Marshall dies at 95; electronics exec gave millions to USC

By Carla Rivera

Entrepreneur and USC trustee Gordon S. Marshall, who made a fortune distributing electronics components and bestowed millions of dollars on his alma mater, has died. He was 95.

Marshall died Tuesday of natural causes at his home in Pasadena, USC officials said.

Marshall was one of the longest-serving trustees in USC’s history, having joined the board in 1968, and served as chairman, secretary and in various other capacities. He made national news in 1996, when he donated $35 million to the university’s business school, at the time the second-largest gift in USC’s history. The Gordon S. Marshall School of Business was named in his honor.

At the business school, he lectured in several courses and served as executive-in-residence. He received several alumni awards for excellence, including the alumni association’s highest honor, the Asa V. Call Alumni Achievement Award, in 2005.

Marshall’s devotion to the campus extended to the Trojans football team, and he was said to never miss a game.

“Gordon Marshall was a soft-spoken man with a powerful entrepreneurial spirit and a profound dedication to the University of Southern California,” USC President C. L. Max Nikias said.

Marshall was born Nov. 17, 1919, and grew up in South Pasadena. He was a B-24 bomber pilot during World War II and graduated from USC with a degree in accounting in 1946.

He founded Marshall Industries in 1953, acting out of a love of electronics gained as a teenage ham radio operator. The company, based in El Monte, was listed on the New York Stock Exchange in 1959 and grew to become one of the nation’s five largest distributors of electronics components. The company was purchased by Avnet Inc. in 1999.

In a 1997 interview with The Times, Marshall said he never took his success for granted.

“I was down to my last few thousand dollars I had saved from the Air Corps,” he said. “I started with nothing and was lucky and worked hard and was at the right place at the right time.”

Then-USC President Steven B. Sample had approached Marshall before for a large gift and one day Marshall decided it was time.

“When you get to my age, and you are slowing down and on the downside of the curve, you look around and say, “What can I do that’s worthwhile?” Marshall told The Times. “Having been associated with the university for all of these years ... I said: ‘Wouldn’t it be great to maybe give some money to the school.’ I’m happy, proud, pleased and grateful that I can do it.”


“Gordon Marshall was an inspiration, both to the USC community and to me personally,” Marshall School of Business Dean James G. Ellis said. “His words of wisdom served as a source of guidance and support, and his tireless dedication helped forge a legacy of excellence that continues to set the standard for U.S. business schools.”

Marshall was preceded in death by his wife, Lynne, and is survived by daughters Alison, Karen and Valerie.