

Jack Anderson and Les Whitten

Filling Hughes' Shoes

The man who has stepped into the late Howard Hughes' shoes is brash, brawling attorney, Chester C. Davis.

Federal authorities believe that the 66-year-old Davis may have been secretly calling the shots for the eccentric billionaire long before Hughes died last April. Davis is a director and general counsel for the giant Summa Corp., which controls most of Hughes' assets.

Mexican investigators have established that Hughes was not mentally competent during most of his stay in that country. He died a penthouse hermit, ensconced in Acapulco's fashionable Princess hotel.

Treasury Secretary William E. Simon, impressed with the mounting evidence that Hughes may have been incompetent during his final years, has ordered an investigation by the Internal Revenue Service. Simon wants to protect the government's share of the Hughes fortune.

If Hughes wasn't in control of his affairs, Simon wants to know, why wasn't a guardian appointed? Who was in control?

So far, the clues point to Davis. Over the past several years, our sources say, the Hughes organization has lost the stamp of its sole stockholder and has slowly assumed the feisty Davis' personality.

For instance, Hughes shunned publicity, covered up scandals and never permitted controversy to explode onto the front pages. If he had a dispute with subordinates, he simply bought them off.

It would have been totally contrary to the Hughes personality to engage in a public power struggle with aide Robert Maheu, who supervised Hughes' Las Vegas dominion. Yet Maheu was fired, and the scandal hit the headlines.

The way the fracas was handled, our sources suggest, indicates it was the result of Davis' bulldozer mentality. How-

ard Hughes, they claim, simply wouldn't have acted like that.

Now there is evidence that Davis is personally masterminding a clever scheme designed to keep the Hughes' empire from being carved up by courts in several states where the billionaire had holdings.

Summa has asked a Delaware court to appoint Hughes' cousin William Lummis as the firm's sole stockholder. Since Summa was incorporated in Delaware, the courts there may have jurisdiction over all other state courts. Thus, the other claims to the Hughes estate could be short-circuited.

Davis and Lummis, a government affidavit reveals, have a close, confidential relationship. The Securities and Exchange Commission document discloses that Lummis' own attorney would not answer for his client without discussing "the matter with Chester Davis."

Footnote: We attempted to reach Davis for his side of the story, but he did not return our call.

Washington Whirl—Some of Alex Armendaris' buddies gave him a testimonial dinner this month in Dallas. The happy occasion may turn out to be the last hurrah for the beleaguered boss of the Office of Minority Business Enterprise.

For the Justice Department is reviewing allegations that Armendaris accepted gratuities from federal contractors and mismanaged taxpayers' money.

The Department's confidential findings have been forwarded to the new Public Integrity Division at the Justice Department, a special section set up to investigate corruption by public officials.

The irrepressible Armendaris, meanwhile, charged the taxpayers for his plane ticket to the Dallas testimonial, as well as his hotel expenses. An OMBE spokesman explained solemnly that Armendaris just happened to have official business in Dallas anyway.