

Mont Marin park lives on in Jerry Russom's Memory

Despite the death February 2 of Councilman Jerry Russom, his name and memory will live on with the 192 acres of open space that he helped Terra Linda homeowners acquire in 1973.

The Mont Marin open space between Canyon Oak Drive and Lucas Valley Road now bears the name Jerry R. Russom Park, dedicated to the man who worked with neighbors and city officials to acquire the open space amenity.

That was hardly the only civic activity to which Mr. Russom, a member of the City Council for the last three years, lent his time and support. He had been a member of the Dixie School District Board of Trustees, a chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee to the San Rafael Redevelopment Agency, a board member of the San Rafael Public Education Foundation and an active participant in the campaign to have the city buy the Falkirk and Robert Dollar mansions as cultural centers.

Hundreds of people attended Mr. Russom's funeral service at St. Raphael's Church on Fifth Avenue February 6. A reception at Falkirk followed. Members of the City Council, U.S. Congresswoman Barbara Boxer, Marin Supervisor Gary Giacomini and Robert Stockwell, Assemblyman William Filante and Marin Superior Court Judge Richard Breiner attended.

Mr. Russom tried unsuccessfully to get elected to the council in 1881 but ran again in 1983 and won.



Jerry Russom

“People loved to work with Jerry – he had that magnetism,” said Fred Kanter, president of the San Rafael public Education Foundation and a campaigner on both of Mr. Russom’s runs for City council election.

Mr. Russom had a way of attracting people to his enthusiasm for community work. “You didn’t mind if there was work involved because you just looked forward to being with him,” Kanter said. “The first campaign, which he lost – he was just so much fun to work with ... You almost enjoyed losing because it sparked his humor so much. “He had such a good sense of humor. He was a very bright guy but he had a humility about him. It’s a tragic loss,” Kanter said.

“What I most remember is Jerry smiling. Along with his intelligence, he was very creative. Not only could he bring out his own ideas, but he could bring out the best in other people,” Kanter said.

Mr. Russom was diagnosed with a rare and terminal neurological disorder in December. He eventually moved from his home to Garden Sullivan Hospital in San Francisco where he died a week ago Monday.

The Councilman ran his own public-relations firm in San Francisco.

He is survived by his wife Marge and two daughters.

Mayor Lawrence Mulryan closed the February 2 City Council meeting with a tribute to Mr. Russom. In a tear-choked voice, Mulryan said: “Our dear friend and colleague is gone. He sat on this council over three years. But his generosity to the community began long before he joined the council. Open space was his very special love.” He then named the Mont Marin open space as Jerry R. Russom Park and adjourned the meeting in his memory.

About a dozen friends of the Russom family who had watched the proceeding in the council chambers exchanged hugs with themselves and council members. Some cried and others offered reassurances.

“It’s a real loss,” said Councilwoman Dorothy Breiner. “I’ll miss him as a colleague on the council and as a friend.”

Breiner said she had great admiration for the the deceased council member, whom she knew for a long time because of his early activity with the Falkirk mansion and tenure on the Citizens Advisory Committee.

“I never heard him complain about things,” she added. “He always had a good sense of humor and a twinkle in his eye. We’ll miss him a lot.”

She described his leadership role in acquiring Mont Marin open space as “one of his greatest accomplishments.” Mr. Russom was president of the Mont Marin Homeowners Association at the time.

To buy the 192 acres and prevent development from occurring there, 272 parcel owners in the immediate area formed an assessment district to raise the \$317,500 needed for purchase.

Mr. Russom’s efforts helped convert the Robert Dollar Victorian mansion on Mission Avenue for use as the Marin County Historical Society.

Flags on city buildings and at the county Civic Center were flown at half mast last week.