

I've lost another good friend

Alan Cruikshank, President | Published in the Fountain Hills Times | June 2, 2021

The Town of Fountain Hills has lost another of its outstanding citizens. And I lost another dear friend with the passing of Jerry Miles last Saturday night.

First, there was Mike Petrone, president of the Civic Association and the Sunridge Foundation; Sharon Morgan, special events coordinator for the Chamber of Commerce; and Walt Dunne, the School District superintendent. With Jerry's passing and my moving to Las Vegas, the five of us can no longer say, "Well, where's our next meeting?"

Thirty years ago, I never would have imagined this friendship with Jerry taking place. I viewed Jerry as "the competition." He suddenly appeared on the local political scene to challenge my friend, John Cutillo, for the office of mayor. John had led the successful campaign that incorporated our community into The Town of Fountain Hills. The county-appointed first council elected John as the first mayor. He was admittedly pro-MCO (his daughter was long employed by them) and pro-development.

Jerry announced he would challenge John for mayor in 1992 on the theme, "no more armadas of yellow bulldozers." I and others took that to mean he was anti-development. We at The Times editorialized against his election and we were very pleased that he lost, even though it was by just three votes.

To my surprise, Jerry remained friendly and even invited me to lunch about a year later to discuss things I would like to see happen in our new town. One of those things I brought up was to start a Sister Cities program in the community.

I had become familiar with the program when I was Chamber president for three years in the early to mid-1980s. My mom had been sent a magazine

story from her brother in Australia on the Captain Cook Memorial Jet in the capital city of Canberra. It looked like our fountain and the surrounding terrain looked similar to Fountain Hills. The mountain range in the background was called the Red Mountains. We have Red Mountain. It seemed like a natural for a Sister City.

Problem was, when I had checked in the 1980s, we needed to be incorporated as a town or city to be a part of the Sister Cities program.

Well, to make a long story short, Jerry won the next mayor's election and three days after his election I got a call from him. I thought he was calling to say something about his getting elected without our endorsement and I reluctantly took the call.

"Hello Alan," he said in a friendly manner. "Remember that conversation we had a year ago about Sister Cities? Would you be interested in heading up a committee to look into that for me? I think we could have some fun with this."

That committee was formed under the auspices of the Civic Association. As it turned out, Canberra would have no part of us, and a year-long search turned into a partnership with Kasterlee, Belgium. The basic premise of Sister Cities, as President Dwight Eisenhower had envisioned, would be to build better relations among the people by communicating, thus creating better chances for peace among the nations of the world.

We planned an exploratory trip to Kasterlee in May 1996. I accompanied the official Fountain Hills delegation of Mayor Jerry and Jackie Miles, Vice Mayor Marianne Wiggishoff and her husband, Cyril, and Sister Cities Committee members Bob and Phyllis Horan. It was an amazing trip. The Kasterlee delegation, including Mayor Walter Otten, met us at the Brussels airport. During our time in Belgium, we returned to Brussels for a session with the U.S.

Ambassador to Belgium, toured the site of the Battle of the Bulge and were wined and dined in Kasterlee.

On Sunday morning of that week, a leisurely walk down a tall tree-lined street in Kasterlee forever changed my view of Jerry Miles. On that walk, we came to understand each other better. I learned that his “armada of yellow bulldozers” was not just a campaign theme, but a vision of something that could be done better. He wasn't against development; he was just against the way it was being done.

“Fountain Hills is a special place,” he said. “You can have development without tearing up that beautiful landscape. Granted it is a more expensive way to develop, but in the end, you'll have a town that will be worth a lot more and we'll all benefit.”

I had to travel halfway around the world to get a better understanding of Jerry and where he was coming from. That walk was one of the best half hours I ever spent. In keeping with the Sister Cities theme, we had a better understanding of each other through communicating. Jerry ended up losing his quest for a second term.

Ironically, it was a development project that cost him the election. (He voted in favor of building the apartment complex across from Safeway). As mayor, he told the developers of CopperWynd (now Adero Scottsdale) that the only way they would get the zoning changes they needed would be to make sure the revenue-producing buildings were in Fountain Hills and not Scottsdale. You drive across the property line separating Scottsdale and Fountain Hills as you drive up Eagle Ridge Drive toward the resort. And after the club was approved, Jackie and I served on its first advisory board.

Another project we got into together was the publishing of the town history in a book called "Rising above the Rest." We were assisted by Jean Linzer, Jerry's long-time secretary.

Yes, over the years I have watched this extraordinary couple continue to do things to make Fountain Hills a better place.

They have opened the doors of their home for numerous fund-raisers, sponsored and hosted concerts and created a public arts program that continues to add quality to our community with each additional sculpture. We say thank you, Jerry, for your vision, guidance and your friendship.