

Town icon Jerry Miles passes

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Former Mayor Jerry Miles passed away Saturday, May 29, 2021, leaving the Town of Fountain Hills with his larger-than-life legacy in politics, philanthropy and civic involvement. Mayor Miles had been in ill health for some time.



The former mayor is remembered in the Town of Fountain Hills for his generous financial gifts for the betterment of the community, his outspokenness on various local political issues and his love for the arts.

“There is so much Jerry Miles accomplished that will be spoken about in the coming days and weeks, but what immediately comes to mind is that Jerry embraced Fountain Hills as his hometown and left no doubt about his commitment to our community,” Mayor Ginny Dickey said. “Jerry and Jackie's generosity of time and resources in many areas...including his public service as mayor, the arts and education...benefited many over the years, and we are the better for it.”

Former Mayor Linda Kavanagh and her husband, State Representative John Kavanagh (also a former Town Council member) issued a joint statement regarding the passing of Mayor Miles.

“Our association with Jerry Miles spans over two decades, almost as long as we have resided in Fountain Hills, because it is impossible for anyone who has been involved in town activities to not have worked with Jerry on at least one of his many contributions to our community,” the Kavanaghs state.

“Our involvement with Jerry covers the political, community service, business promotion, philanthropic and arts fields. Yes, Jerry had his hands in almost everything in town and the recipients of his talents and drive welcomed those generous outstretched hands.

“John knew Jerry as the mayor who assisted him while he was on the Parks and Recreation Commission, as a promoter who helped him win election to both the town council and the state legislature and always as a knowledgeable advisor in affairs both local and state.

“Linda knew Jerry as the promoter of her three mayoral terms, but she also knew him much earlier than that in many venues but especially on the Chamber of Commerce Board, as a volunteer with Sister Cities and as the driving force, with Jackie, behind the Public Arts Committee.

“However, Jerry Miles greatest contribution to us was that of being our friend and we will miss him dearly.”

His life

He was born in Rocky Ford, Colo., and just as he was beginning school, his family moved to Clayton, N.M. One of the fondest memories of his youth in Clayton was listening to Cleveland Indian and Brooklyn Dodger games on the Liberty Network with his best friend, Stanley Beckner. They never missed when the Indian’s Bob Feller was on the mound. Jerry’s family relocated to Lamar, a small community in southeastern Colorado, just prior to beginning his high school years.

High school began with Jerry trying out for the football team. He broke his arm and he never got to play. But he did land a part in the school play and wife Jackie said he could still recite his lines. He also took journalism classes and worked on the school yearbook. He was elected president of the Southeastern

Traffic Safety Board and upon returning from that group's state convention, he was approached to be a radio personality by the station's owner. He was on the air for 15 to 20 hours a week. Working after school and all day on Saturday, his radio show, Jerry's Junction, began attracting regular listeners.

Upon entering college at the University of Colorado, he found he needed to make extra cash. He worked as a dishwasher, was a teletype setter operator for the school newspaper and was a cashier at a Safeway market.

He met Jackie

He met an attractive brunette named Jackie who was serving on a committee he chaired that was planning CU Days. It was an encounter that would forever change his life.

Jackie and Jerry got married, and he taught his new bride how to be a teletype setter operator. She became proficient with her new trade and that was their primary income while Jerry went to law school. They didn't live extravagantly but during that first year of marriage, they splurged a bit on two purchases. One was a Vespa motor scooter to get around and the other was a small gibbon monkey that they named J.J.

"J.J. bonded with Jerry," Jackie recalls. "He'd carry him on his shoulder wherever he would go."

Jerry was always looking for ways to make money. His entrepreneurial spirit led him into buying a sandwich business. From that he rented a piece of property and put in a trampoline business. At the outset, the profit picture jumped with every bouncing teenager. But then someone with the same type of business got sued and the trampoline businesses across the country began disappearing. So did Jerry's.

Then there was the London double decker bus Jerry bought in the 1970s. He was a high bidder by phone on the Channel 8 annual fund-raising auction. The bus had a bar built in it, thus it became a great party bus. He discovered that insurance was incredibly expensive, so he formed The London Bus Company, and he placed Jackie in charge of leasing it out for parties. He got a special driver's license so he could drive it for their kids' birthday parties. Jackie made sure she hired drivers for the adult functions. They had the bus for three or four years and then sold it to a person in Santa Barbara.

Getting back to his roots, he became a radio announcer in Canon City, Colo. He did it all. He was a sports announcer and also the music disc jockey and reported the news. One of his best memories of being a sports announcer was when he and another reporter covered a high school football game played in a blizzard. They couldn't see the field for most of the game and so using some ingenuity, they began making up plays. They pulled it off and no one was the wiser.

Jerry liked the radio business, and he began sending resumes to stations all over the country. He was contacted and offered an on-air position with a station in Lancaster, Calif. He heard Lancaster was near Los Angeles, so he thought very little before accepting. In his dreams, it was Hollywood here we come. Lancaster was no Hollywood, and it wasn't really that close to Los Angeles.

Decides on law

One evening while taking a bath, he suddenly told Jackie that he had decided to attend law school. Never one to hold back when he was pursuing something, he went straight to the UCLA law school dean's office and asked him about the program. To no one's surprise, Jerry finished first in his class at UCLA. Warren Christopher, who later served as Secretary of State during President Clinton's first term, gave Jerry his first job with a law firm. While

working with the law firm, Jerry made a name for himself in the social and business communities of the Los Angeles area. He served as chairman of the USO, which put together celebrity dinners to raise money for the Bob Hope USO Center in Hollywood.

Begin a family

Jerry and Jackie raised two children, son Doug, who lives in Hawaii and is a neurologist and daughter Judy whose is an attorney living in the San Francisco Bay area.

One summer, while Judy was in law school, she was hired by Jerry's law firm to pick up and deliver important documents to the firm's clients. Little did she know that most of her pickups would be to retrieve items such as briefcases, glasses, umbrellas, etc. that her father had left behind at clients' offices.

His law career would take him to two additional firms.

In 1980, he took up the hobby of hot air ballooning. By the time he came down from his first ride, he had talked the pilot into selling the balloon to him. Jerry got his balloon pilot's license and flew four times in the international balloon festival in Albuquerque, N.M.

In 1983 Jerry and his cousin formed a partnership to own and operate the Saguaro Lake Marina. Using his knowledge of marinas, Jerry formed Westrec Properties in 1987 and within two years this company purchased 18 marinas throughout the United States.

Move to FH

Because of its proximity to Saguaro Lake, Jerry and Jackie bought a home in Fountain Hills in 1985. They moved to the community permanently in 1990.

Upon settling in their new hometown, Jerry felt compelled to get involved. His first major project was to help form the Neighborhood Property Owners Association. He had interacted with many well-known politicians during his law career but running for mayor in 1994 was his first political race. In one of the state's closest elections on record, he lost to incumbent Mayor John Cutillo by three votes! Disappointed but still determined, he ran again in 1996. This time he won the election by a good margin.

His two years in office saw the town government take steps to plan for the town's future. A bed tax was approved giving the town an additional revenue source as the number of hotel rooms increased, the Sister Cities program began, the temporary sign ordinance was enacted and the Hillside Ordinance was established.

Although he lost his bid for re-election, he has remained active in the community. Jean Linzer, who worked for him for 17 years in California and Arizona, nominated Jerry for the Chamber of Commerce's Business Person of the Year award. In her letter of nomination, she said, "He has been able to take advantage of his success by giving a great deal of time and effort to the Chamber and especially to our community. Thus, as a businessperson he has been a leader by example in donating his time and resources. I believe Jerry exemplifies the kind of businessperson we want to see in our community."

Community activities

Jerry's community activities have been numerous including service on the boards of the Library Association, Historical Society, Sunridge Foundation, Golden Eagle Foundation, River of Time Museum Foundation, Arts Council, Noon Kiwanis and the Civic Association. He wrote or assisted each of those organizations with their by-laws and articles of incorporation.

Committed to transforming Fountain Hills into a public art mecca, he and Jackie donated several pieces of public art to the town's collection. They firmly believed that having public art displayed creates a certain ambiance that is attractive to potential businesses that could re-locate here, and it could be a town tourist attraction. The couple personally contributed more funds than any other individual toward the acquisition of public art in the community. It was his idea for a major fund-raising tribute dinner that raised over \$160,000 in one night for the construction of the display sets in the River of Time Museum.

Honors

In addition to receiving the Chamber's Business Person of the Year Award, he and wife Jackie were honored by the Sunridge Foundation which awarded them with the Champions Award.

Jerry was active as an elder with the Fountain Hills Presbyterian Church. He and Jackie sponsored three major scholarships annually for 10 years through the Golden Eagle Foundation.

Jerry Miles has indeed given much to his community and there are even more things that he has done anonymously that only the recipients of those funds are aware of.

There was little question when his nomination to the Lower Verde Valley Hall of Fame in 2005 was approved. He and Jackie have made major contributions toward making Fountain Hills a better place.