

Former teacher, water district trustee remembered

By Linh Tat
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FREMONT — Whether advocating for creek preservation and public parks, teaching high school social science, taking his boat out for commercial fishing or collecting pollen for allergy shots, Harry Brumbaugh was a man of many talents and interests, relatives said.

Perhaps best known for his service on the Alameda County Water District board from 1966 to 1990, Brumbaugh, who also taught at Washington High School in Fremont, died of cancer March 4 — one month shy of his 84th birthday — at home surrounded by family members.

His wife of 45 years, Barbara Brumbaugh, said Thursday that comedian Will Rogers may have never have met a man he didn't like, but her husband never met a man who didn't like him.

"He had a very pleasant personality — very kind, outgoing — and was a very good decision-maker," she said, referring to her husband's reputation as a district board member who asked thoughtful questions and moved meetings along.

Frank Borghi, who served alongside Brumbaugh, said his colleague was a conscientious board member who studied the issues.

"He never allowed politics to interfere with his decisions," Borghi said.

Brumbaugh, Borghi and board member Art Lampert, who also died last week, led efforts to turn Fremont's Quarry Lakes into a recreational area. Brumbaugh also spearheaded efforts to repopulate Alameda Creek with steelheads and worked to divert a sewage line from Livermore from entering the creek.

Born in Clovis on April 9, 1925, Brumbaugh enlisted in the Navy at 17. He never saw combat, but while testing a flight suit aboard an SB2C plane known as a "Helldiver," the pilot he shared the plane with crashed into the waters near the Arctic Circle in 1945, his wife said. Brumbaugh was the only survivor.

At the end of World War II, Brumbaugh earned an undergraduate degree in industrial relations and, later, a master's in school administration from Fresno State. He received a counseling credential from Stanford.

After teaching in the Fresno area, Brumbaugh moved to Fremont, where he worked as a counselor and the dean of students at Washington High, before returning to the classroom and teaching social science for 35 years. He retired in 1993.

He met his wife while she was teaching in Fremont in 1962. The couple raised two daughters, who became educators. Diana Brumbaugh is an assistant principal at Mission San Jose High and Jill Bekaert is director of Christian education at River Community Church in San Jose.

In his spare time, Brumbaugh would take his boat, "Beezo," out to catch salmon and collect pollen for pharmaceutical companies to use in allergy shots. Brumbaugh would use an apparatus that he built to separate the pollen in his backyard.

"I always felt like my father could do anything. He was a politician and a teacher, but he also fixed (and) built things. There was nothing he couldn't do," daughter Diana said.

In addition to his wife and daughters, Brumbaugh is survived by his brother, Harry; son-in-law, Gilles Bekaert; and grandsons Conor and Nathaniel Bekaert.

A memorial service will be held at 3 p.m. March 20 at St. James Episcopal Church, 37051 Cabrillo Drive, Fremont. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to the Salvation Army.