

Former SLT Councilman Crawford dies at age 82



Bill Crawford touched many lives in the nearly 50 years he lived in South Lake Tahoe.

By Susan Wood

Bill Crawford, who made a name for himself on the South Lake Tahoe City Council, died Friday. He was 82.

Mr. Crawford was more than a two-term council member. He loved nature, was an avid athlete and a teacher who touched many lives.

The news of his Nov. 25 death prompted several family members, friends and acquaintances to say much about him.

“Bill Crawford exemplifies ‘service for others’ as all of his

passionate advocacy was done in the truest of purpose to serve others, to serve his community. It mattered not whether he agreed with a position or opposed a position, in either case he spoke with a steadfast commitment for the betterment of the community," City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Some may say it was Mr. Crawford who had the last word, leaving an undaunted spirit blowing in Tahoe winds of doing what he felt was right and speaking up for the underserved – even if it was unpopular to others.

"My dad did not come by his convictions because it was easy to arrive at. It came from a passion in many things. When he went into city politics before joining the City Council, he had a love of where he lived," his daughter Marlowe Crawford told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Mr. Crawford served on the South Lake Tahoe City Council from 1998-2002 and 2006-10. In many respects, those years came about in some critical times – redevelopment, vacation home rental ordinances and the mounting issues of unfunded liabilities to cover salaries. The latter represented an under-the-radar issue seldom mentioned but also avoided based on the magnitude of the impact on employee salaries.

"I served on the City Council with Bill from 1998-2002. This was an exciting time for the city as we began to embark and eventually successfully complete the Heavenly-Gondola Redevelopment Project," Brooke Laine told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Although Bill was a staunch opponent of redevelopment, his perspectives and opinions were sometimes significant to helping the council form a well-rounded approach. Bill often left poems at my council chair relative to topics we would eventually take on. Whether I agreed with him or not, we always respected each other, greeted each other warmly, and always shared a good chuckle about our years on the council. No doubt: he cared."

His warning to the city about using eminent domain at the expense of the little guy embedded his reputation as one who believed the city should stand up for all citizens – not just for those with power and money.

“In a way, my dad felt the City Council had given up on the city – that there was going to be some magic bullet, but the city was going to pay a high price for it,” his daughter said. “He thought there needed to be a voice that was not seen as being in the pocket of special interests.”

Marlowe Crawford understood how her father was misunderstood.

“In some ways, it was infuriating to engage with him in debate. But I could talk to him and we’d have these discussions about many things,” she said.

During kinder, gentler times, he enjoyed spending time with his wife of 62½ years, Jonnie. He also liked sharing what Marlowe and her two brothers, Paul and David, were up to.

“People think they know him because of how he was outspoken in so many things, but he was also a private man,” his daughter said, adding how his family meant the world to him.

On any given day, Mr. Crawford liked to sit quietly in his living room and look out the big picture window onto his beautiful front yard near the Tahoe Keys.

He pondered many things, including the role of literature and history in today’s modern-day world.

He often would write letters to media publications and quote famous excerpts, while weaving in the issues of Lake Tahoe’s times. He’d often send the letters to his daughter to fill her in on the latest happenings around town as if to show her there were areas needing improvement. Marlowe grew up on the South Shore, but now lives in Oakland.

At times, he tapped into her knowledge working at the law

library to gain insight on a perplexing issue.

"He'd sometimes say to me: 'Look around. The city's not in a good place.' But then I'd say to him: 'But ,dad, it's still one of the most beautiful places'," she reflected.

Mr. Crawford enjoyed being in the beauty. He loved being outdoors on his bike, and on the alpine ski runs and cross country ski trails. Once he saw this reporter on skis and like a good trainer-teacher instructed to bend the knees more.

He even found the time to train for a marathon.

Mr. Crawford coached football at South Tahoe High School for one year, but spent more time sharing the latest techniques in cross country skiing and running. Nonetheless, he was best known in academic circles, having taught history at South Tahoe High, the former South Tahoe Intermediate School and Mount Tallac High School. He taught for 24 years.

"I have been a friend of Bill Crawford for nearly 50 years. He was an excellent teacher, a runner, a poet, and a football and a ski coach at South Tahoe High School," Les Wright told *Lake Tahoe News*. "He was a watchdog for the community and school district. He wasn't afraid to tell the emperor that he really wasn't wearing new clothes. He was very passionate about teaching and helping his students. His watchdog personality was controversial at times, but I am sure glad he was part of our community and a longtime friend of mine."

There was a time when Mr. Crawford was president of South Tahoe Educators Association.

Mike Patterson, who years ago had that same role, said, "Bill was always a strong advocate for public schools, students, and teachers. Bill always fought for what he felt was right, regardless of any consequences. He helped teach me what it was to be a union member and later what it was like to be union leader."

Mr. Crawford's own education was also notable, having earned a bachelor's and master's in social science from CSU Long Beach.

Wendy David's interactions with Mr. Crawford were mostly when he came to either a Lake Tahoe Unified School District or City Council meeting. She has been the leader of both boards.

"Bill Crawford always followed his conscience and spoke his opinion and belief. In doing so he often became our collective conscience," David told *Lake Tahoe News*. "His poetry questioned the accepted point of view. He often quoted literary figures as a reminder that we are all a part of history in making decisions for the future."

The Crawfords moved to South Lake Tahoe in 1967.

Mr. Crawford succumbed to a brief illness before his body gave out. He suffered from a stroke two years ago.

No services are planned, and no donations will be requested. Marlowe did ask well-meaning residents to respect her mother's privacy as she grieves – knowing how difficult it is to hold back gestures in honor of a man committed to causes and caring about Tahoe's future.

Kathryn Reed contributed to this story.