
Apple Valley visionary remembered: Dick Pearson credited with starting incorporation movement

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APPLE VALLEY — Thirty-three candidates vied for the seats that would make up the first Town Council, but among the favorites was the man credited for starting the movement that led to incorporation.

When votes from the Nov. 8, 1988, election were finally tallied, Richard “Dick” Pearson finished a close third to Nick DePrisco and Heidi Larkin-Reed, securing his place on the dais and in Apple Valley history.

Pearson, a more than 40-year town resident, died Oct. 21 at the age of 85, leaving behind an indelible legacy that includes tours of duty during the Vietnam War, teaching and community involvement rivaled by few.

Larkin-Reed, the town’s second mayor, described Pearson as “the person who had the vision for what Apple Valley could be.”

“He was an instructor for the MBA students at George Air Force Base, and he had them work on the project that looked at incorporation,” she said. “He was on the board of directors for the (Apple Valley Chamber of Commerce) at the time. He brought the idea to the chamber board. The board liked it and agreed to it.”

The Apple Valley Incorporation Drive committee (“AVID for short”) was formed as a result, according to Larkin-Reed, who said the process itself required a year’s worth of proposal work and hearings before the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO).

Larkin-Reed remembered the early days after incorporation as a “great” time to be in Apple Valley and Pearson as a man who gave all things consideration.

“He was thoughtful and smart,” she said. “I never really saw him get irate or upset. We might have approached it from different angles at the time, but we all were striving for the betterment of Apple Valley.”

But the celebration following incorporation was brief. Failing roads and a deficient law enforcement presence were chief concerns among town residents, who looked to the new Council for answers.

June 1989 brought a recall effort against Pearson, Larkin, Carl Coleman and Jack Collingsworth. The attempt, led by Eve Forcinel, accused the tetrad of going back on election pledges to control growth by favoring land developers over residents’ aforementioned concerns.

Forcinel’s recall failed to gather the necessary signatures, though, and Pearson became the first Town Council member to run for re-election after Coleman and Collingsworth opted against seeking second terms.

Forcinel, who was among 10 candidates in April 1990, predicted a Pearson loss, saying at the time that his record of voting for “every high density housing project” had not sat well with citizens.

She was wrong. Pearson won re-election in dominating fashion, raking in nearly 51 percent of the total vote count, and was subsequently named mayor by his peers.

Victor Valley College Board of Trustees member and local businessman Joseph W. Brady, who first met the man after moving to the High Desert in May 1988, said Pearson won re-election because voters knew he was “passionate about Apple Valley and the High Desert region.”

“He always had the Valley first, the people in the High Desert first,” Brady said, “and he was a very articulate person. He treated everyone with respect. If you disagreed with him, I never saw him say anything bad about anybody.”

Born on April 1, 1932, Pearson grew up in New Rochelle, New York, about 26 miles northeast of New York City. He earned a bachelor’s degree from Trinity College in 1954 and entered the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps, completing his flight training in 1955,

Pearson flew 170 combat missions in both the Republic F-105 Thunderchief and the McDonnell Douglas F-4 Phantom II during three tours in Vietnam from 1965 to 1972. His military career included 28 years of active duty, according to his Daily Press obituary, and he retired in 1981 at George Air Force Base.

In addition to his time on the Town Council, which ended in 1994, Pearson served on multiple boards and committees in the Victor Valley, and co-chaired the formation of the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District.

He was so involved in both local government and the community that Apple Valley Chamber CEO Janice Moore said she couldn't remember a time when she didn't know him.

"What an amazing man," Moore said. "We used to put him in the Village parade, and we'd have him wear his honorar mayor's hat. And, oh my gosh, so many people remembered him."

Brady remembered Pearson not only as a civic leader, but as a friend and gentleman.

"We need more guys like that. We don't see people like this in our country anymore," Brady said. "And that's why he was so well liked and well respected. You could be having the (crappiest) day in the world, but if you saw Dick Pearson you couldn't help but smile. I miss him."

A memorial will be held at 2 p.m. on Nov. 12 at the Church of the Valley in Apple Valley. Donations in Dick Pearson's memory may be made to the Red Cross or Wounded Warriors, according to his obituary.

Read Pearson's recollection of the

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