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## Moraga's third mayor, Merle Gilliland, is fondly remembered

By Vera Kochan



Merle Gilliland Photo provided

The town of Moraga was incorporated in 1974, and one of its citizens, Merle Gilliland, played a large role to that effect. Having served on the initial town council for two terms, Gilliland, who passed away on March 31, became Moraga's third mayor in 1976.

Besides using his architectural skills to design the Town Seal, Gilliland worked on several projects within Moraga and the Bay Area (San Francisco International Airport). As a member of the very first town council, he helped to format ordinances, plans and the eventual establishment of the Moraga Police Department. In 1976, Gilliland and his fellow council members were presented a town certification plaque from then Gov. Ronald Reagan acknowledging Moraga's incorporation. It was also the first five council members who were instrumental in preserving the area now known as Moraga Commons Park for family recreational purposes.

Former colleague and the town's fourth mayor (1977), Susan McNulty-Rainey stated, "We were a close group.

We all kept on getting together after our council duties. We were very close on many decisions - it took us forever to decide the color of the town's stationary." She remembers Gilliland as "a wonderful man who donated a lot of his time and used his architectural skills to help us out."

"Merle was a pleasure to work with," recalled Barry Gross, the town's fifth and 11th mayor (1978 and 1983), who also served with Gilliland on the town council. "He was very talented. He had the ability to disagree without being disagreeable. His loss is felt deeply, I'm sure, by anybody and everybody who knew him besides his family."

Betty, Gilliland's wife of 64 years, has fond memories of their time in Moraga. Although they have since moved to Montana, she also remembers the closeness of the town's first elected officials and their families. "We had a lot of really good times with the town council. We got along so well - it was a blessing."

Many will remember Gilliland for his sense of humor and injection of fun for the town's benefit. His wife reminisced about the time Saint Mary's College hosted a Fourth of July event and she was in charge of baking 14 cakes for the occasion. She enlisted one of their daughters to help frost all of the cakes who eventually lost enthusiasm after completing a very few. Enter Gilliland who not only helped to frost the rest of the cakes, but when the job was done proceeded to have a frosting war with his daughter all over the kitchen.

Before the Pear Harvest existed, Gilliland had arranged with the owner of Nation's Bakery to bake pear pies to sell at the Pear Festival. He went out to the orchards every year and hand picked pears to personally deliver to the bakery.

Borrowing from Gilliland's obituary, "Through both challenging and joyous moments, Merle created levity through laughter, bringing smiles to those around him. It is through those relationships and memories that Merle's legacy will proudly and confidently live on."

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