



George Furguson



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Karen Pearlman Contact Reporter George Bailey, the longtime La Mesa mayor and former San Diego County supervisor, died at his home Monday of congestive heart failure, with his son, Richard, and one of his caregivers by his side. He was 100. The Ohio native was known for his buzz-cut, flat-top hairstyle, no-nonsense style during a 35-year career in government and commitment to the East County where he lived for 84 years. “My grandpa was very strong,” said Bailey’s granddaughter Kristin Dreesen, of Mount Helix. “But the last week was really rough. On Friday, I sang to him and he kind of turned his head toward me, making a little bit of a frown because I was singing the wrong words. I sang him some children’s Sunday school songs and squeezed his hand, but I could tell something was wrong. We really all figured he was going to outlive us all.” His accomplishments included oversight of the Grossmont Summit project, which improved the traffic flow between Highway 94, Interstate 8 and points north; the preservation of the cross atop Mt. Helix by transferring ownership from the county to the San Diego Historical Society; and securing funds for the detention center in San Diego that bears his name. Bailey also helped form the East County Economic Development Council. “George lived such a full life and will remain an inspiration to me,” said county Supervisor Dianne Jacob, who started in politics under Bailey. “East County is a better, more vibrant place today because of his decades of hard work and public service. While his passing marks a great loss, the region will continue to benefit from his rich legacy.” Former La Mesa Mayor Art Madrid got to know Bailey in the 1970s when both were on different city commissions. “George Bailey is a throwback to what people wanted in their elected officials,” Madrid said. “They wanted to have their average neighbor be a policymaker yet not go ahead and make that his livelihood, not make it more important than himself. He really didn’t have that personality of the backslapping politician.” He also was able to convince you to support him because he commanded instant respect. Even if it was your first time meeting him, you knew



this guy was sincere in every aspect. George set the bar for local officials in East County that few have matched.”Walt Ekard met Bailey during the 1984 campaign when Bailey was elected county supervisor. Ekard was chief of staff to Brian Bilbray, who was also elected supervisor that year.“We became friends particularly because he and I were both early risers and we’re typically the first to arrive in the morning at work,” Ekard recalled. “We had a friendly competition to see who would get there first. Usually around 6 or 6:30 a.m.“He had a unique ability to be able to charm people into seeing things his way but also to be a tough competitor when that was required. He was an enormously effective political leader with a terrific sense of humor and a heart of gold.”His son Richard, of Northern California, said his father was far more than a political figure.“George was an adventurous traveler, an avid golfer, and forever a reciter of obscure poetry and singer of songs with lyrics long forgotten by most,” he said.George Ferguson Bailey was born Feb. 28, 1919, in Dayton, Ohio, the fourth of six children born to Russel Thomas Bailey and Helen Reeder Bailey.His father, a graduate of MIT with a degree in civil engineering, moved the family from Ohio to Florida, Georgia, Michigan and New Mexico before landing for good in Southern California. The family settled in Imperial County and then in San Diego County in 1932.Bailey graduated from Grossmont High School in 1937 and from San Diego State Teachers College in 1941. He was a standout football player and student leader, majoring in economics with minors in political science and speech arts.In March 1944, George wed his second wife, Elaine Magdaline Kelley. Their union lasted for 70 years until her death in 2014. His first wife, Marjorie Wight, passed away due to complications from her pregnancy.During World War II, George helped supervise aircraft production at Consolidated Vultee, the precursor of Convair and General Dynamics. He enlisted in the Army and shortly thereafter received a commission in the Navy and served on the Red Oak Victory in the Pacific Theater. He was released from the military in 1945 because two of his brothers died during the war, and Bailey was a sole surviving son.Bailey and his wife owned and operated Homeland Florist for eight years starting in 1946. He then returned to work at Convair, later moving on to General Dynamics Astronautics and Rohr Industries. He concluded his career in private industry as an independent consultant



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specializing in materials management, project administration and systems development. Bailey began his career in public service in La Mesa starting in 1957 when he was appointed to the La Mesa Parking Commission, followed by two terms on the Planning Commission, five terms on the City Council and four years as mayor. He was named “La Mesa Man of the Year” and “East County Citizen of the Year” in 1964. In 1984, he was elected to the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, serving District 2 for two terms before retiring in 1992 as the board chairman. Bailey also served as president of the San Diego Convention and Visitors Bureau, director of the National Association of Regional Councils and chairman of the California Councils of Government. He served on the Criminal Justice Council, the San Diego Association of Governments and the Airport Land Use Commission. He was a member of Vista La Mesa Christian Church for six decades and was part of La Mesa Lodge No. 407 of the Free And Accepted Masons Of California. He is survived by sons Gary and Richard; four grandchildren; 10 great-grandchildren; and one great-great-grandchild. He will be interred at Greenwood Memorial Park. A memorial service is tentatively planned for 2 p.m., Saturday, April 27, at the Vista La Mesa Christian Church, 4210 Massachusetts Ave., in La Mesa.



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