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NEWS



Muni Evers

Longtime mayor and relentless city booster dies

Muni Evers leaves a legacy in city

by Lori Pappajohn - Record reporter

The man who created the vision for the waterfront, who helped found the Hyack Festival and who served as New Westminister's mayor for 14 years has passed away.

Last Thursday, former New Westminister Mayor Muni Evers passed away at home after a brief battle with cancer. He was 87. Evers served as mayor from 1969 to 1983.

Evers was a relentless believer in New Westminister - and a man with a stubborn determination to get things done. Under him and his council, New Westminister changed more than it had since the First World War.

He was the one who envisioned New Westminister's industrial waterfront being transformed into housing. His and his council's other initiatives included the new law courts, the relocation of Douglas College to downtown and the building of seniors' housing. With his federal connections, Evers helped secure the badly-needed Brunette Street overpass - and secured 50 per cent federal funding for the building of the Canada Games Pool.

At the time, his was the longest term of any mayor in the Royal City.

Born into a poor, but prominent Winnipeg family in 1914, Evers was a university-trained chemist. After the Second World War, during which he served as an RCAF lab tech, he settled in New Westminister with wife Shirley.



Here in the Royal City he experienced the same anti-Semitism that had plagued him in Winnipeg. (He was kept out of the University of Manitoba medical school by its Jewish quota.)

In 1982, Evers told Vancouver magazine: "New Westminster was a very parochial and insular city then. Unless you were a native son or daughter, or had played lacrosse here, you couldn't get in."

But not only did Evers get in, he became a political force in the city, province and country.

His role as president of the Union of B.C. Municipalities and vice president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, put New Westminster on the map.

His strong leadership qualities drew the attention of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau who asked Evers to run as the New Westminster MP in 1972. Evers declined - he had his sights set on projects in New Westminster - and he wasn't about to be derailed.

Over the years Evers would be awarded the Order of Canada and named New Westminster Citizen of the Year and receive the Queen's Medal and Plaque for his outstanding service - both as a politician and as a community member.

Not a man to mince words, he was quick to criticize the provincial government when it dropped him from both the PNE and Royal Columbian Hospital boards because he wasn't a Socred. He always prided himself in being apolitical.

Founder and president of the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society, Evers also served on numerous other associations, including practically running the GVRD when he was director and vice chair in the mid 1970s.

At the time he laughingly said he'd been called a "benevolent dictator."

In 1982, when he announced his retirement, Evers, with a twinkle in his eye, told The Record: "I'm very satisfied with my term. I'm not saying I'm perfect, but I'm close to it."

For Evers, retirement meant a chance to drive off into the sunset - which he could do with ease in his signature 1963 Corvette roadster which he loved to drive to work.

Evers came by his interest in politics naturally. His father was chair of the Winnipeg school board for 15 years and his uncle was a long-standing Manitoba MLA.

"He was a wonderful father, husband, grandfather and great-grandfather," says daughter Robin, adding that her father also owned and operated the Medical Arts Pharmacy at 6th Street and Princess, a business he started in 1946, when New Westminster's uptown was still mostly residential.

"He and my mom were married 62 years and they were still in love and would hold hands. He treated her like a princess her entire life. His last thoughts were of her and that she'd be taken care of."

"He was a great guy," said former New Westminster Mayor Betty Toporowski, who was a city councillor when Evers was mayor.

"He was very progressive for his time. He accomplished a lot of things

that took a lot of hard work and vision. The waterfront was Muni's pride and joy."

Evers was also instrumental in starting the Hyack Festival which now attracts 300,000 people.

"His legacy is that he was a real builder," said Coun. Cal Donnelly who served under Evers. "He put foundations in place that we're still working on today. He had long-term visions and he was stubborn in that he wanted them done. We'll be missing him, that's for sure."

Evers leaves behind wife Shirley, daughters Lesley and Robin, six grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

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