

'Mr. Transportation' Bob Schroder, father of Martinez's mayor, dies at 90



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Robert Schroder

Bob Schroder, 90, whose public service career earned him the nickname “Mr. Transportation,” died Friday at his Walnut Creek home. He was the father of Martinez Mayor Rob Schroder.

“He had a good, long life,” the mayor said of his father.

Born in 1928 in San Francisco, the elder Schroder moved to Walnut Creek at 2. During his early years in that city, it began to resemble what Martinez looks like today, his son said.

A businessman, Schroder also served on the Walnut Creek City Council for 16 years, starting in 1960, and was its mayor three times, Mayor Schroder said.

The elder Schroder also was on the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors for 16 years, representing District 3 at a time of growth.

First elected in 1976, he held the seat until 1992. During that time, Danville expanded and San Ramon was incorporated. He saw the growth of the Bishop Ranch development, his son said.

A member of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, Schroder also was the founding chairperson of the Central Contra Costa Transit Authority, which became the County Connection.

The agency described Schroder as “instrumental in our creation as a Contra Costa County supervisor and MTC Commissioner.”

He remained on the County Connection until 1996, and saw his son become part of the agency two years later.

When Schroder first joined the MTC, public transportation in the area was a Greyhound bus and a private bus service that provided some service to commuters.

He reached out to area cities, suggesting they pool their transportation revenues. “Why not band together and form a district, and we’ll get a lot more out of it,” his son recalled his father suggesting.

While Schroder wasn't the only person who got public transportation accomplished in this area of the East Bay, his hard work has been memorialized in a BART suspension bridge over Treat Boulevard for hikers and bikers.

That overpass not only is called "Robert I. Schroder" in his honor, it also bears his nickname, "Mr. Transportation."

He also championed another form of transportation, his son said.

The Iron Horse Trail goes through Schroder's old district. At one time, it was part of the Southern Pacific railroad system. Trains traveled along those rails to pick up walnuts, back when Contra Costa County had booming crops from groves.

When the rail line was abandoned, some people proposed using it for light rail. But that didn't suit neighbors.

The land was supposed to be used for transportation, so Schroder worked toward getting the former railroad site used for pedestrians and bicyclists rather than other forms of traffic.

Schroder was respected by his public service colleagues.

George Miller, the longtime U.S. Representative who has since retired, said, "Bob Schroder's long and distinguished political career transcended politics and focused on what was in the best interest of the children and families he represented.

"He was first and foremost a husband, father and grandfather who viewed each and every issue through those lens "And to top it off, Bob was always a lot of fun," he said. "Cynthia and I send our deepest sympathy and most sincere condolences to Bob's family."

Schroder found time for hobbies, too.

He was fond of snow skiing. "We were a real snow ski family for years," his son said. The family had a place in Tahoe so they could indulge in the family hobby.

The former public servant also enjoyed working in his yard – nothing fancy, but raking leaves and making the yard look nice, his son said. He also loved tennis. He retired from the sport before his wife, Frances did. She finally put her racket away two years ago.

In addition, he enjoyed traveling, whether it was to spend time on a beach in Hawai'i or representing Contra Costa County on trips to Taiwan or touring Russia.

Active in fundraising for nonprofit organizations, Schroder worked with a group that raised money by producing annual musical comedies in the former Nut House, the Walnut Growers' Association warehouse that eventually was replaced with Leshner Center for the Arts, he son said.

Mayor Schroder said his father was "very friendly and lighthearted, but he could be intense at times. He liked to entertain, and my parents always had people at our house."

During his father's years on the Board of Supervisors, the younger Schroder became acquainted with Martinez.

While the younger Schroder was working at the family insurance company, in Walnut Creek, his father often would be in Martinez on county business. If the two needed to meet, that meeting had to take place in the county seat.

The son found Martinez reminded him of Walnut Creek of years ago, and its charm lured the younger Schroder and his wife to buy a home here. "Because of him, I found Martinez," the younger Schroder said.

Schroder is survived by his wife, Frances, and their children, Mayor Schroder and his two sisters, Susan Mendes and Sharon Schlagel, as well as several grandchildren.

A memorial service will take place at 11 a.m. Tuesday, April 16, at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 1924 Trinity Ave., Walnut Creek.