

ESCONDIDO: Noted philanthropist Jack Campbell dead at 69



Philanthropist and community Jack Campbell with his wife Jill in October. Campbell died Wednesday. North County Times file photo

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Jack Campbell, a man who overcame polio to have a successful computer career and become one of Escondido's best-known philanthropists and community leaders, died Wednesday of cancer. He was 69. Campbell was remembered Thursday as a bright and gentle problem-solver who gave generously of his time and money to Rotary International, Interfaith Community Services, Neighborhood Healthcare, Patio Playhouse, the Escondido arts center, the Boys & Girls Club, the YMCA and the Downtown Business Association. He also served on the Escondido Planning Commission for 11 years, and [co-founded](#) the Escondido Charitable Foundation in 2007.

"What a sad day for Escondido," said fellow Rotarian Linda Bailey. "Jack was one of the kindest people I've ever known."

Bailey also said Campbell was remarkably driven and energetic, and that he never let using a wheelchair slow him down.

"You would never think of him as disabled," she said.

Dr. Nick Tsoulos, another Rotarian and one of Campbell's closest friends, called him a well-rounded man who viewed his adult years as a bonus after being diagnosed with polio at age 5.

"He was very bright and thoughtful, and he had a wonderful sense of humor," said Tsoulos. "He understood people and he liked everybody. He wasn't just a computer geek."

While studying math at UCLA, Campbell would make regular trips to Las Vegas, where he consistently won at blackjack by counting cards.

"He was very smart, and he could keep track of many things at once," Tsoulos said.

That detail-oriented approach to life made Campbell a somewhat unusual philanthropist.

"He didn't just give money, he worked on the planning and organizing of the projects that his donations funded," Tsoulos said.

Jill Campbell, his wife, said Campbell's altruistic nature probably stemmed from help his parents got in paying his medical bills from the March of Dimes. In addition, he was driven by a desire to share all the innovative ways of helping people that he could imagine.

"He seemed to be able to come up with solutions other people wouldn't be able to think of," she said.

17 years in Escondido

Born in Iowa and raised in Los Angeles, Campbell didn't move to Escondido until he retired in 1995.

But he made up for lost time by almost immediately becoming a popular and well-known member of the community, said former Mayor Lori Holt Pfeiler, who served on the City Council from 1992 to 2010.

"Jack and Jill really immersed themselves in the community," said Pfeiler. "You would run into them at many, many events."

Pfeiler said Campbell had an impressive way of getting things done, citing his support of the arts center as an example. She said Campbell wasn't just a cheerleader, but that "he challenged the center to do its best."

On the Planning Commission, Campbell brought a pro-business perspective and a steady nature, said fellow longtime member Darol Caster.

"He was a good listener and took all comments into consideration," said Caster, adding that Campbell's absence was conspicuous when illness forced him to leave the panel early this year.

During one of his last meetings on the commission, Campbell [raised concerns](#) that city plans to allow high-rise buildings downtown could worsen traffic congestion in unacceptable ways.

After spending much of his youth struggling with polio, Campbell received a bachelor's degree in math from UCLA in 1964 and then worked for IBM from 1966 to 1981. He then ran his own software company until he retired in 1995.

Tired of the smog and traffic of Los Angeles, the Campbells picked Escondido out on a map, visited and quickly found a house just east of the city limits near Citrus Street.

Then, in 1998, [Campbell contacted](#) Rotary Club members about his desire to contribute \$12,500 to support Rotary International's global drive to eradicate polio. Club members quickly rallied additional donations to match Campbell's generosity and persuaded him to donate even more, Tsoulos said.

The club ultimately collected \$46,000, spurring a districtwide effort that brought in \$140,000 in one year and paid for a national immunization day in the North Africa country of Eritrea.

Subsequently, the Campbells became involved with a long and steadily growing list of local civic groups and philanthropic endeavors.

"He really wanted to make the world a better place," his wife said. "And he always had a smile on his face."