

Patricia Wiggins, Retired Senator, Obituary

Sen. Patricia (Pat) Wiggins, ret., died on August 15, 2013 in Sonoma County, CA, after a long illness. Pat's life included a distinguished public service career with her election to the Santa Rosa City Council, the California State Assembly and the California State Senate.

Pat lived a life of integrity filled with passion for making the most of each day. She delivered local and statewide policy achievements that reflected her love of the North Coast and its way of life, including adopting "smart growth" provisions in state planning and funding critical research on the phylloxera virus that devastated vineyards in the 1990s.

Pat was born on April 19th, 1940, in Pasadena, CA, the only child of Ralph Wiggins, an aircraft mechanic and movie stuntman, and Grace Wiggins, a homemaker.

As a young woman, Pat was both glamorous and adventurous. She was a finalist in the Miss Descanso Gardens beauty contest in 1958 and had completed five parachute jumps by the age of 20. Intellectually curious, she became the first member of her family to ever attend college, when she enrolled in Pierce Junior College in 1959. Eighteen years later, she graduated with honors in English from UCLA. She would also study mathematics, computer science and law.

She met her husband, Guy Conner, in 1979 when both worked in the Software Engineering research department at System Development Corporation in Santa Monica. They married in Santa Barbara on March 13, 1983. In the spring of 1984, they moved to Sonoma County and settled in Santa Rosa.

Pat approached all of her adventures with kindness, a magnetic warmth that drew people to her, a brilliant smile, and an uncanny knack for both leading and inspiring. As a public servant, Pat applied all of her considerable talents and passion for Sonoma County and the North Coast.

Pat believed in the power of our democracy and its ability to change lives for the better. And she lived that belief.

In 1985, Pat started her public life as a neighborhood activist, galvanizing community support to maintain access to Annadel State Park from the west side. She helped found Concerned Citizens of Santa Rosa, a group that continues to advocate locally for the needs of residents over the wants of narrow interests.

Before her first election to public office, Pat also served on the boards of the Sonoma County Farmlands Group and the Sonoma Land Trust. She not only supported many civic, social welfare, and environmental groups, but she also

believed in bringing everyone together and she worked tirelessly for pragmatic, progressive solutions.

Her first race, in 1992, was for Santa Rosa City Council. She finished a close third in a race for two seats, receiving the most votes ever by a unsuccessful candidate. This left her inspired to try harder the next time.

Pat ran in the next City Council election, and won. She served on the City Council from 1994 through 1998.

In 1998, Pat won election to the State Assembly despite being outspent 6 to 1 by two other candidates. She served three terms, left the Assembly in 2004, and was elected to the State Senate in 2006. Pat retired from the Senate in 2010 after her term ended.

Pat put herself into the public spotlight despite developing a profound hearing deficit later in life, which required technologically advanced hearing aids to overcome. She rarely spoke of her condition and never let it affect her work. While some doubted that a severely hearing-impaired person could even effectively campaign for office, Pat's policy achievements while in office showed determination, spirit and chutzpah matter more than physical limitation.

She leaves a legacy of cooperation and innovation, one that shows what communities can do when they pull together. Pat's legislative accomplishments are at work protecting our environment, providing students career technical education opportunities, and helping California's wine industry to flourish, among other things. In the state Capitol, she fought for North Coast issues large and small, making state government responsive to community and individual needs. She loved her work and the North Coast.

Pat sought to put others in the spotlight and actively nurtured the development of other people for public office. She played a key role in the election of literally scores of local and state elected officials from the North Coast changing the landscape of local elected bodies toward a more progressive and publicly accountable frame of mind.

Pat is survived by her husband, Guy, and her cousin, Kathie Reilly of Altadena, CA, who was like a sister to her. Pat also leaves behind her two stepsons, Steve Silverman of Scottsdale, Arizona, and James Silverman of Owings Mills, Maryland, whom she took in as her own children after Steve and James lost their mother in 1982. "Grandma Pat" will also be missed by her four grandchildren, Shane, Ava, Leah, and Solana.

A celebration of her life will be held at the Friedman Center in Santa Rosa at 1:00 Sunday, November 3. Contributions in lieu of flowers can be made to the

Sonoma Land Trust (sonomalandtrust.org/), or to the Pat Wiggins Fund at Conservation Action Fund for Education (cafefund.org/).