

Pacifica Tribune



photo by Jean Bartlett

In September of 2015, Pacifica's first mayor and first city manager, Jean Fassler and Karl Baldwin, met to celebrate the Pacifica Historical Society's renovation of the Little Brown Church.

'The end of an era' Pacifica mourns loss of first city manager

By Jean Bartlett
Tribune Writer

In early January of this year, Pacifica's first city manager Karl Baldwin lost his beloved wife Eileen. The two married in July of 1951 and lived a life of adventure and caring. In late 2017, the couple said farewell to Pacifica, the place they had called home since shortly after Pacifica incorporated in 1957. At the ages of 96 and 94, Karl and Eileen moved to Washington State to be closer to their daughter Liz. But they still kept in touch and still lent their support to the Pacifica Historical Society. (Along with donating time and moral support to the PHS throughout the years, the couple donated \$25,000 to help restore the Little Brown Church and \$25,000 to help restore Ocean Shore RR Car 1409.) Recently it was

learned that Karl Baldwin passed in May. With the additional loss of Pacifica's first mayor this past November, one longtime Pacifican noted "It's the end of an era."

Karl A. Baldwin was born in San Francisco on August 12, 1921. Raised in Oakland and Berkeley, Karl graduated from College of the Pacific in Stockton with a degree in political science. His goal was to work in municipal administration. While in college, he also went into the Naval Reserve. When he entered WWII in 1943, he did so as a Lieutenant Junior Grade.

Karl served from 1943 to 1947 at the Naval Station in Samoa. He was the assistant port director at Pago Pago and additionally served as harbor pilot for two years. Following the War, Karl did his post graduate work at UC Berkeley. During that time he was courted by the Public Administration Service (PAS). They were working on an administrative study project on eight university campuses and Karl accepted their offer.

The work he did included: undertaking a legislative study at the university, and examining joint problems and solutions within the various campuses. He also went on assignment to San Mateo to compile that city's annual statistics report. He stayed with the PAS for two years and was subsequently appointed to the National Public Administration Service which specialized in government analyses. In July of 1949, he accepted a job in San Mateo – Assistant City Manager.

In April of 1953, he accepted a new job – first Town Manager of Los Gatos. "Most importantly," he would often say, "in 1951, I met a young woman from Kent, England." A former sergeant with the RAF (Royal Air Force), Eileen Cousins had been traveling the world working as a bookkeeper and was getting ready to move back home. She never made that move.

Following Pacifica's incorporation on November 22, 1957, Pacifica's first City Council – Mayor Jean Fassler and Councilmen George Mason, Don Miller, Gerry Schumacher and Harold Feyge – and Acting City Manager Jane Hicks interviewed city manager candidates. Karl got the job. His starting salary was \$10,000 a year.

"So much had to be brought together – lighting, sanitation, the fire department – so we could function as a City," Baldwin said in a previous interview with this writer. "But we got things going. It was such an interesting time."



Pacifica Historical Society photo.

Karl Baldwin, Pacifica's first city manager, on the job in 1958.

his retirement, Karl was very involved with the city he had helped to create. This included serving as an interim manager of Pacifica's North Coast County Water District.

Pacifica's first City Hall was a building donated by realtor Ray T. Higgins. It was two rooms and a bath and there was just enough room for Karl, his secretary Claire Rawlings, a couple of desks, a typewriter, a file cabinet and a mimeograph machine. Less than a year later, Higgins donated the old San Pedro School House at 170 Santa Maria Avenue. Karl oversaw the building's complete transformation and to this day, City Hall remains largely unchanged.

By the time Karl and the City Council got the Pacifica Police Department up and running, and the bond issue to finance sewage treatment facilities was decided, former renters Karl and Eileen bought their home on Olympian Way in Pedro Point.

Baldwin was City Manager for nine years. In 1967, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) was looking for individuals with experience in municipal local government to work as public administration advisors and Baldwin headed off to Vietnam, with Eileen and their two children following. Through Baldwin's work with the USAID, home would also be Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia. During that time, they rented out their house on Olympian Way and stayed with their best friends, Bill and Peggy Drake, when they came home on 30-day, bi-annual leaves. (Bill Drake was the owner, publisher and editor of the Pacifica Tribune from 1959 until 1989.)

The couple returned to Pacifica full-time in 1982. By then their son Bruce had married and their daughter Liz was in college. In

Karl's extraordinary achievements in leadership have been recognized by the City of Pacifica, the PHS, California Congresswoman Jackie Speier, State Assembly Member Kevin Mullin and State Senator Jerry Hill.

"Often people ask me what were Pacificans like back then," Karl said in 2017. "How did things go at City Council meetings? Pacificans have always been an interesting lot and an independent group, very outspoken and lively, just like now. They are a community that cares."

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