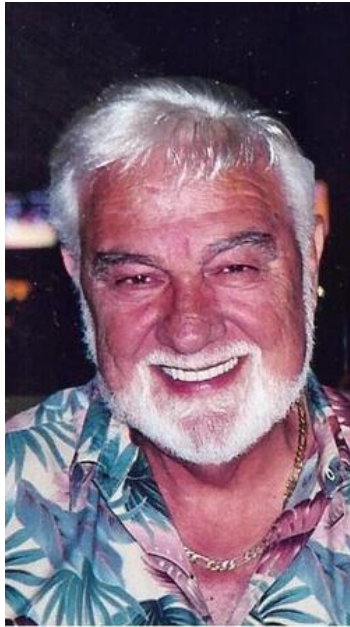


Developer played role in renovating Gaslamp



Leon Herrick

MAY 31, 2011, 4:50 PM

When Leon Herrick made his first investment in Gaslamp Quarter property, the area was home to an assortment of rundown buildings, seedy bars, pawnshops and adult businesses.

He was among the local businessmen and leaders who shared a vision of a Gaslamp renaissance. Over the years, he bought various parcels and helped restore the historic downtown district to some of its former glory by sinking millions of dollars into redevelopment projects including the two-turreted Louis Bank of Commerce Building on Fifth Avenue. As an advocate for the renovation of San Diego's historic landmarks, he played a role in transforming the Gaslamp into a popular dining and entertainment district of trendy restaurants, bars, nightclubs and shops.

Mr. Herrick died of cancer May 21. He was 75.

An entrepreneur who started his own medical management business, Mr. Herrick had retired from his enterprise when he started renovating buildings in the downtown historic district. He and his eldest daughter, Catherine Herrick Spencer, started San Diego Historic Properties and were involved in several downtown projects. "He developed a passion for sensitively renovating these historic buildings. He was the largest owner of Gaslamp property in the 1980s and early '90s," Spencer said. "He was a pioneer in the resurrection of the Gaslamp Quarter. You didn't go there at noon, (before the transformation) let alone at midnight."

Mr. Herrick received several awards from historic agencies for his work, which included the Louis Bank of Commerce building where Wyatt Earp once frequented the Oyster Bar and the Cole Block Building which now houses the popular La Strada restaurant, Spencer said.

Mr. Herrick was “a protector and promoter” of the Gaslamp District, said local attorney Maria Burke Lia, who specializes in historic landmarks. “He was a very enterprising developer. He was very creative in finding new uses for historic buildings ... putting a nice Italian restaurant on the ground floor of one building,” she said.

“He was one of the driving forces in taking the Gaslamp from a derelict area into a vibrant place,” said attorney Mike McDade. “He had a vision that a lot of people did not have.”

In addition to his work in the Gaslamp, Mr. Herrick was active with the Bobby Sox Girls Softball League, including serving as president several years. After the death of a fellow coach in the 1980s, Mr. Herrick founded the Scott McDonald Memorial Fund, which raises money to renovate and build ball fields, Spencer said.

A. Leon Herrick was born Sept. 5, 1935, in Prairie Grove, Ark. to Alvin and Pauline Herrick. The family moved to Whittier when he was five. He graduated from Whittier High School and attended Cal State Fullerton, where he earned degrees in finance and marketing. He earned an MBA from the University of Southern California in 1966.

He married his high school sweetheart, Frances George, and they were together 45 years until her death in 1999. He married the former Dorothy Campanile in 2001.

Mr. Herrick had worked for Computer Data Systems before starting his own San Diego company, Health Practice Management, in 1972.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy of Spring Valley; four daughters, Catherine Herrick Spencer of La Mesa, Penny Herrick Dressler of San Juan Capistrano, Kerry Herrick of Rancho San Diego and Danielle Herrick Penny of Rancho San Diego; a brother, Doyle Herrick of Pasadena; a sister, Wilma Herrick First of Redondo Beach; and 13 grandchildren.

Services will be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday, June 1 at Greenwood Mortuary, 4300 Imperial Ave., San Diego.

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