

On Local Government: Redondo Councilmember Dawidziak saved library

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on local
government



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by Bob Pinzler

“He was an honorable man.” Shakespeare had Marc Antony damn Brutus with such faint praise. However, Joe Dawidziak was someone who not only embraced the concept but lived it and lived it well.

I first met Joe when we were elected to the Redondo Beach City Council in 1993. We had beaten incumbents. (Yes, it is possible.) Neither of us was expected to win.

There was little we agreed upon politically on a national scale, but we found common ground on local issues. We both became involved in regional government through the Southern California Association of Governments (with the unfortunate acronym: SCAG.) We came to see local issues through a different prism. And when a problem arose that we could work on together, we did.

In the mid-1990s, our area suffered a severe recession after we dared to win the Cold War. Aerospace contracts dried up, dramatically affecting the local economy. The City Manager at the time saw an opportunity to “repurpose” a City property on Artesia Boulevard called the David Hayward Center. It was a neglected meeting room building with a small branch of the City library attached to it. The City Manager had been squeezing that branch dry to make it more palatable for its closure, perhaps making the property available for sale to gain instant revenue.

During those days, the divide between north and south in Redondo was even more vituperative than it is now. There was even a serious secession movement in its infancy.

Marilyn White and I, the two councilmembers from the north, wanted to save the branch, but we needed a third vote. Joe not only raised his hand but also found a means to pay for it.

At that time, there was very little access to the Internet in people’s homes. A few libraries provided access at speeds that would now be considered outrageously unacceptable, but were exceptional then. Joe figured out that the State would provide funds if a city could prove it was saving “vehicle miles traveled.” He determined how many miles it would take for North Redondo residents to drive to the newly opened main branch near City Hall. Along with the help of Assemblywoman Debra Bowen’s office, the City obtained a grant to install two computers in the North Branch based on that calculation.

Suddenly, there were lines out the door. The branch was not only saved, but a new City Manager who loved libraries, Lou Garcia, started the process of creating the new building we have today. It wouldn’t have happened without Joe, a Council member for the District farthest from the North Branch.

I knew Joe for over 30 years. We recently served on the Charter Review Committee and enjoyed it very much. No one has cared as much about this City as he did.

This honorable man will be sorely missed.

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Dawidziak passed away last month, at age 78. The Redondo Beach City Council adjourned in his memory at its Tuesday, June 10 meeting. **ER**