

Melvin Beverly 1925-2009

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe's first city attorney, Melvin Beverly, died Oct. 29. He was 84.

Flags are being flown at half-staff in his honor.

Mr. Beverly's roots on the South Shore run deep, as do his family's. His grandfather, John E. Dunlap, was a rancher in South Lake Tahoe. Some of the Dunlap clan still owns the property near the Tahoe Keys along the banks of the Upper Truckee River.



Melvin
Beverly, circa
1970
Photo/Laine
Photography

He was born Sept. 15, 1925.

Mr. Beverly earned his law degree in 1952 from Boalt Hall at UC Berkeley. He spent the first two years out of law school as a clerk for a U.S. Appeals Court judge. In 1954, he began practicing law in Placerville. He worked on the West Slope for seven years before moving to South Lake Tahoe with his wife, Evelyn.

The Beverlys had been married for 48 years.

Mrs. Beverly said during the last nine years the two spent a good deal of time traveling. Mr. Beverly also kept up with his golf game after retiring in 2000 as a commissioner with El Dorado County Superior Court.

"Mel certainly was an institution in the legal profession and basically was the founding father of law in South Lake Tahoe in particular," El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury said. "He was very much a mentor to me as I was making my way up the ranks as an attorney. He gave a lot to the community and to the legal profession. He was extraordinarily well respected by the Bar."

Bob Henderson knew Mr. Beverly for more than 30 years, having worked in his law office for a couple years in the early 1980s.

"He was a good man. We are going to miss him," Henderson said.

In March 1989, Mr. Beverly became a commissioner with the court and retired from private practice. Retired El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Terrence Finney, who is out of town, appointed Mr. Beverly to the position.

Kris Dehnen clerked for Mr. Beverly.

"As a human being you couldn't ask for better," Dehnen said through tears. "He was patient when he needed to be and firm when he needed to be."

She remembers beautiful jazz coming from his chambers on afternoons when a trial wasn't scheduled. Dehnen also recalls Mr. Beverly being diligent about his 2:30pm break to go outside to smoke a cigar.

"He was really the most delightful man. He had a heart of gold," Dehnen said.

Sylvia Smith knew Mr. Beverly as an attorney and court commissioner from her work as a court reporter.

"When he walked into the courtroom, as a court reporter I knew there would be no game playing," Smith said.

She said when Mr. Beverly became a commissioner he was there early, but rarely worked past 5pm so staff could get the paperwork done.

"He was very respectful of women," Smith said. "He was a gentle man."

She also remembers Mr. Beverly as being a good dresser, who never showed up at a function in anything less than a sport coat and tie.

Smith spent the better part of Thursday at the Beverly home. She read a scrapbook about Mr. Beverly that said originally his plan was to become an accountant, but then he went into the Army. He was in World War II on the front lines in a tank.

Smith remembers Mr. Beverly caring about families, and how hard the Child Protective Services cases were for him.

It's because of Mr. Beverly that Court Appointed Special Advocates is in South Lake Tahoe.

Jim Duke, who was president of Rotary Club of South Lake Tahoe at the time, remembers Mr. Beverly, who was a member, talking about starting CASA and how it took a couple tries to get a grant for the program.

"He was a quiet supporter of things in the community," Duke said. "I was chairing a church committee and we needed some legal help. I told him what I needed and clearly was prepared to pay for it. But then he refused to accept any money for it."

Duke said that's how Mr. Beverly did things –behind the scenes, without wanting recognition.

Mr. Beverly is one of a handful of people who got the Tahoe

Valley Pharmacy Building off the ground. It was there that he opened the law offices of Beverly, Riley & Petersen.

While he had his private practice, Mr. Beverly also was legal counsel for several agencies: South Tahoe Public Utility District from 1957-59, Lake Valley Fire Protection District from 1958-65, California Tahoe Regional Planning Agency from 1968-70, and South Lake Tahoe from 1965-72.

"Mel was a man of great integrity. He cared deeply about Tahoe and his family's heritage, and having been given the opportunity to guide the city through its very early years," said Del Laine, a family friend for years.

In June 2001, the city honored Mr. Beverly for his years of service to the city. The proclamation mentions how Mr. Beverly wrote South Tahoe's first sign ordinance.

Mr. Beverly was instrumental in helping the city get incorporated in 1965. That November he was appointed the first city attorney. As the job began to entail more work, Mr. Beverly successfully lobbied upon his departure in 1972 for the city attorney to become a full-time position.

Mr. Beverly served as interim city attorney from August 1976 to November 1978.

Besides the legal arena, Mr. Beverly was president of the South Lake Tahoe Little League and South Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce, a board member at Barton Memorial Hospital, and a member of Rotary. At the time of his death, Mr. Beverly was on the Lukins Brothers Water Company board.

Survivors include his wife Evelyn Beverly of South Lake Tahoe; sons William Beverly of Placerville and Robert Chadwick of Ontario, Ore.; daughter Kathryn Fenton of Davis; and two grandchildren.

Mr. Beverly did not want a service. The family plans to

scatter his ashes to honor his love for Lake Tahoe.