

Lakritz filled key roles in Hanford

By Jim Steinberg / The Fresno Bee

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Simon "Si" Lakritz, 78, a former Hanford mayor, City Council member and longtime Hanford High School history teacher who never feared announcing himself politically liberal, died Wednesday in a Visalia hospital.

He had suffered pneumonia after recovering from a serious auto accident in July.

He was born in Detroit, and moved as a youth with his family to Tucson, Ariz., where he graduated from high school, then from the University of Arizona in 1953. He served in the U.S. Army during the Korean conflict, assigned to the European Army Central Command in Germany.

Newly married, Mr. Lakritz returned from Germany to the United States.

He completed master's degrees in Latin American history and teaching instruction methods from the University of Arizona and was recruited to teach history at Hanford High School.

Willard Roberson, a former assistant principal at Hanford High and a retired high school principal in Barstow, knew Mr. Lakritz well as fellow educators and fast friends, beginning in 1975.

Roberson, who is black, called their long, close "salt-and-pepper" friendship a meeting of minds and hearts.

Roberson said Mr. Lakritz was well-known and loved in Hanford for the decades he taught there and for his character.

Mr. Lakritz served as federal projects coordinator for Hanford High, ran for Congress in 1968 as a write-in candidate, and in 1971 became chairman of the Kings County Democratic Central Committee.

He ran for Congress again in 1984, but did not oust Rep. Charles "Chip" Pashayan, the Republican incumbent at the time.

Mr. Lakritz served on the Hanford City Council from 1974 to 1986, and again from 1988 to 2000.

He held a seat on the Hanford Joint Union High School board from 2002 to 2006.

His wife, Mary "Mimi" Elizabeth Lakritz, died in 1991.

Bradley Lakritz said his father, a Democrat, managed to win almost 50,000 votes against Pashayan in his run for Congress, but could not overcome the Ronald Reagan presidential re-election landslide of 1984.

Bradley Lakritz lives in Northern California now, but said he and his brothers encounter similar reactions whenever they visit Hanford: "Hey, aren't you Si Lakritz's son? Your dad really influenced me."

Roberson, who is president of the Hanford chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said Mr. Lakritz was a fine writer and editor who helped craft ballot arguments to make Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday a school holiday in Hanford.

"He was a tremendous guy," Roberson said. "He's just a brother."

A memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. Monday in Hanford Civic Auditorium.

The reporter can be reached at jsteinberg@fresnobee.com or (559) 441-6311.

MORE INFORMATION

Simon 'Si' Lakritz

Born: May 14, 1930

Died: Sept. 17

Occupation: teacher, former Hanford mayor

Survivors: sons Andrew M., Jeffrey, Bradley W. and Thomas S. Lakritz