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Bob Merritt's Celebration of Life

By Sophie Braccini



Bob Merritt in the great outdoors Photo provided

The Bruns Amphitheater in Orinda was filled to capacity May 31 with people who came to honor the life of Bob Merritt. A man who generously gave of his time, skills and enthusiasm to many groups, Merritt was best known in Moraga for his role as one of the "obstetricians" of the Town of Moraga, and for his 12 years of volunteering on the school board. A lawyer with a specialty in real estate law and an avid backpacker, he was passionate about the restoration and preservation of the outdoors.

Merritt passed away in February, but his family decided to wait before organizing his celebration. The moving ceremony started with the Cal band playing for one of their own - Merritt graduated from the UC Berkeley School of Law. Following the band were his 13 grandchildren, interpreting "The Redwood Rap," a song written by their grandfather expressing his love of nature, and the necessity to consciously preserve it.

Business associates and presidents of nonprofits where Merritt volunteered spoke, as well as some of his family members. Peter Sheaff, longtime friend and backpacking buddy, described Merritt as a wealthy man, the definition of wealth being the abundance of anything, only fitting someone with such a large breath of engagements

and activities. That was a theme that ran throughout the talks - how Merritt had given so much to so many groups from the Save the Redwoods League to the Stanislaus Wilderness Volunteers, to the Moraga School District, and the Town of Moraga where he brought his legal knowledge to the incorporation committee in 1974. He was named Moraga Citizen of the Year in 1983.

A big part of Merritt's life was his love of the outdoors. As member of the Cal Alumni Association's board of directors, Merritt helped create the Lair of the Bear's master plan. He took his entire family, including his grandchildren when they turned 6, along with willing colleagues and friends, backpacking in the East Bay, the Sierra and beyond. Sheaff described what nature meant to Merritt, a spiritual place of peace to cleanse the soul.

Maribel Moulton who served with him on the school board recalled how impressed she was that this accomplished professional could take the time to serve as chaperon on field trips with his kids and volunteer in their classrooms, something fathers did not routinely do in the '70s and early '80s. Excellence in education was indeed very important to him, as well as transmission of values.

Sam Hodder, president of Save the Redwoods, indicated that an education program collaborated in partnership with the East Bay Regional Parks District was developed in honor of Merritt, a program that will take Oakland kids on two field trips a year to discover and appreciate the local wilderness. Hodder asked the audience to take on Bob Merritt's challenge: Explore at least one new trail in the East Bay in the coming year, and know that you will be putting your feet in his footsteps, and that he will likely be looking over you.

Reach the reporter at: sophie@lamorindaweekly.com

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