

Feel-Good STORY

Saluting the people that make us proud of our community

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time to take part in The Silver Spurs, a square dancing club that met regularly at the Keizer Elks Lodge on Cherry Avenue Northeast. Music itself had something of a central role in the Bay family. Phil and Joyce were founding members of the McNary High School Band Boosters and initiated the Starlight Dance which remained a band fundraiser for decades.

In 1980, Bay added civic engagement to his already numerous roles in Keizer. There was a new push for Keizer to incorporate as a city and avoid becoming another suburb of Salem.

"Salem had annexed all the land around Keizer and we were about to become part of Salem whether we liked it or not," Bay said. "We went all out for two years to convince Keizer people that we needed to incorporate." Even though the effort succeeded, there were a sizable number of residents who didn't support Keizer staking out on its own.

Not one to rest on his laurels, Bay also ran for city council. He was one of 37 candidates and one of the top five vote-getters, which landed him a spot on the dais. The early days of the city were a struggle.

"To get anything done or approved, we had to have Salem and Marion and Polk counties agree to what we wanted to do," Bay said. "And we suddenly had to provide all these services - like water and sewers - to everyone in the city."

The problems tended to come in waves, but Bay and his fellow councilors made pivotal decisions that still impact Keizer today. When a private school on Chemawa Road Northeast went bankrupt, the Keizer City Council purchased the property. It's now the site of the Keizer Civic Center, the Keizer Cultural Center, a community garden and two city parks.

"We were on our hands and knees for weeks cleaning up the old school so we could use it for meetings and the police station," Bay said.

His time on the council also included paving the way for Keizer Station. Slowly, but surely, the council began working with property owners to acquire a swath of land large enough to accommodate a major shopping center. At that point in time, the goal was to also have a train stop in the mix. While that never materialized, the name stuck when ground was broken nearly 20 years later.

I always assumed that if I was going to live here, I needed to be part of the community and make it a better place. It was something I had to do.

— PHIL BAY

He found setting goals to be a useful exercise in conducting the city's business, even when some felt like pie in the sky.

"We set building a bridge over the Willamette as a 20-year goal. Forty-one years later, we're still just talking about it," Bay said.

Bay came to dread Tuesday morning during the city's early years. Inevitably, someone would call the Monday after council meetings to cancel insurance over a vote he'd cast the previous night. He developed a no-nonsense response the longer he served.

"I told them that if they disagreed they should get involved," Bay said.

Bay walked the walk long after his time as a city councilor with roles on the boards of the Keizer Heritage Foundation and the Keizer Chamber of Commerce.

Eventually, one of Bay's sons followed him into the family business and won a seat on the city council for a while. In the meantime, Bay stayed engaged in the community. He was a team leader when The Big Toy was built in Keizer Rapids Park. He became the public affairs officer for the Keizer Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints after Joyce passed in 2008 after a 43-year marriage.

Looking back over a lifetime of involvement, Bay said there was a sense of duty he was trying to fulfill, but he kept going for the kids in this life, the ones he helped raise and all the others whose lives he touched in the community in nearly six decades.

City Councilor Dan Kohler, who followed in Bay's footsteps at the Keizer Stake and on the council, said it best as Phil Bay Day was etched into the history of the city: "Phil Bay is a lamb with the heart of a lion."



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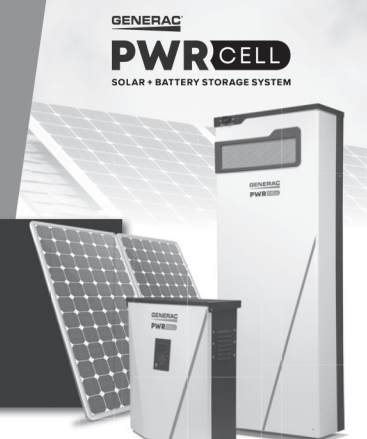
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