



Ron Cooper/Salem Reporter

Gerry Frank, speaks at the dedication for the Gerry Frank | Salem Rotary Amphitheater on July 23, 2021, as Gov. Kate Brown and Sen. Betsy Johnson look on.

# Gerry Frank, a fixture in Oregon politics and philanthropy, dead at 98

By SALEM REPORTER

Gerry Frank, a lifelong Oregonian who made imprints in business, politics and philanthropy, died in Salem on Sunday, March 13. He was 98.

Frank's fingerprints are left on all parts of Oregon. He was a force in pub-

nearly a century long, Gerry Frank has departed. He gifted us with a legacy of matchless deeds and memories. He leaves a loving family, an extended family of countless friendships and an adoring public," according to a statement released Sunday on behalf of the family

by Stephen (Skip) Frank, a nephew.

"Gerry was a massive presence to everyone who knew him or knew of him. You always knew if he was in the same room. His reach and touch extended far, but the prosperity and welfare of the citizens of Oregon was his highest priority," the statement said.

"He shared freely his advice and counsel, sought by many, from the well-known and not so well known. His door was always open and he answered every call. And who could ever forget that firm handshake and eye contact that came with every greet-

ing. He was the real deal," the statement concluded.

He was born in Portland in 1923, attended Stanford University and joined the U.S. Army in 1943. He served in the European theater during World War II and subsequently attended Cambridge

University, earning a bachelor's degree in economics and then a master's degree in politics. He returned to Oregon and joined the family department store business, opening its Salem store in 1955. The business, founded in 1857, was sold in 1966.

Frank started a long association with Mark Hatfield, helping the Republican win one term and then another as governor. While Hatfield was governor, Frank served as chair of the Oregon Economic Development Commission from 1959 to 1966.

After Hatfield was elected U.S. senator in 1966, Frank became his chief of staff, serving in that role from 1973 to 1992.

"The respect in which Gerry was held in Oregon and in Washington, D.C., can be seen in the fact that he was often

referred to as 'Oregon's Third Senator,'" according to a biography prepared ahead of his death.

He served on corporate and non-profit boards through most of his life, including U.S. Bancorp and Standard Insurance.

It was in his nonprofit role that Frank made a significant mark in Oregon, proving an effective fundraiser that helped push major civic projects to done. At one point, it was estimated he had personally raised a half billion dollars for nonprofits.

He was active in Salem life, from the Salem Rotary Club to the Salem Chamber of Commerce. With a partner, he opened Gerry Frank's Konditorei in 1982 on South Commercial Street, which quickly became popular for what is described as "extravagant" cakes. That included one named "Gerry's Chocolate." He remained involved until selling the business in 2017.

And he was an authority on chocolate cake. For 60 years, he was the sole judge at the Oregon State Fair for the Gerry Frank Chocolate Layer Cake Contest.

Frank was also a prolific writer, penning a column for *The Oregonian*, "Frankly Speaking," and later a travel column, "Gerry Frank's picks." He also wrote a guide to New York City, *Where to Find It, Buy It, Eat It in New York*. He updated the book, which sold more than 1 million copies in 16 printings. Frank also produced *Gerry Frank's Oregon*, a guide to every nook of the state that is in its fourth printing.

He collected honor after honor through his life, and his biography said he was particularly proud of being grand marshal of the Portland Rose Parade, the first recipient of Willamette University's Glenn Jackson Leadership Award, and being declared by then-Gov. John Kitzhaber as "Oregon's Premier Citizen."

In 2015, the Oregon Legislature honored Frank with a resolution for his "venerable civic, political, entrepreneurial, literary and culinary contributions to the people of Oregon and for service to community, state and country."

To honor him, the Rotary Club of Salem last year dedicated The Gerry Frank | Salem Rotary Amphitheater at the Riverfront Park. The amphitheater celebrated the club's centennial. Frank



PHOTO/Oregon Historical Society

Gerry Frank judges chocolate cakes at the Oregon State Fair in 1960. He judged the contest for 60 years.

lic and in private to advance the state he loved. And his love for chocolate was unmatched. Frank was proud of being a fourth-generation Oregonian, and part of the namesake family that founded the department store chain Meier & Frank.

"Following a long and fruitful life



Ron Cooper/Salem Reporter

Gerry Frank shares a moment with Gov. Kate Brown on Friday, July 23, at the dedication of the Gerry Frank | Salem Rotary Amphitheater in Riverfront Park in Riverfront Park.