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OBITUARIES

Laguna savior Robert Sharp

By BOB KLOSE
Staff Writer

Robert W. Sharp, a lifelong wildlife biologist and environmentalist who played a key role in efforts to preserve Laguna de Santa Rosa, died Friday in Sebastopol after a long illness.

He was 85.

Sharp was a resident of Sonoma County 21 years and in that time established himself as a mainstay of Sebastopol-area environmental programs.

He was a founder of the West Sonoma County Rural Alliance and served as president of the board for 17 years. A Rural Alliance environmental scholarship is made in his name. He also was on the first board of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, served several years as president and was named president emeritus in 1997. He served on the county's Fish and Wildlife Advisory Committee, received the Environmental Forum's award for contributions to environmental issues in 1984 and was cited for his work on numerous occasions by the Board of Supervisors.

In a condolence letter to Sharp's family, West County environmentalist Jim Sullivan said Sharp provided a lot of the glue that held the Rural Alliance together.

"He always knew how the community worked and did far more than his share of the actual work," Sullivan wrote. "He made his mind and his experience and his considerable bank of knowledge available and I valued his counsel very much. He understood what was important in the world and acted on it and the world is a better place for his efforts."

Sebastopol environmentalist, writer and real estate broker Bill Haigwood gave Sharp much credit for safeguarding the Laguna wetlands.

"Bob Sharp was the architect of the vision for the preservation of the laguna," he said.

Sharp arrived in Sonoma County in 1978 and brought with him a career of experience. A native of Minnesota, he obtained a degree in wildlife biology from the University of Minnesota. He worked for the U.S. Forest Service and was the first fisheries biologist to be employed by the state of Minnesota. He later went to work for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services in Minnesota and participated in programs to cultivate Native American tribal fisheries and wildlife. At the time of his retirement he was assistant regional manager for Fish and Wildlife Services for the Midwest.

Sharp left his career during World War II to serve in Naval Intelligence on board the USS Ticonderoga. He was wounded in combat and received the Purple Heart. He was married in 1939 to Dorothy Petronio, a registered nurse from New York.

The couple moved to a hilltop retirement home between Sebastopol and Occidental in 1978 and Sharp got involved in environmental projects. He also was an avid hunter and sportsman and was an instructor in hunter safety classes.

Sharp's daughter, Catherine Sharp of Graton, said Sharp was particularly proud of his efforts to preserve the Laguna.

"He really knew he had contributed. He was honored in the last couple years of his life by the Board of Supervisors and the Rural Alliance. Laguna Day last year honored him with a plaque and an oak grove will be planted in his name at the Laguna," she said.

Sharp fell and injured himself in December and after several months died of complications at a Sebastopol convalescent hospital on Feb. 19. He and Dorothy Sharp were to mark their 60th wedding anniversary this year.

In addition to his wife and daughter, he is survived by Robert W. Sharp Jr. of Graton, and Tina Reuwsaat of Virginia; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Services are scheduled for 11 a.m., Saturday, March 6 at St. Phillip's Catholic Church in Occidental, followed by a gathering in the church hall next door at noon.

Memorial donations may be made to the Laguna Foundation or the Rural Alliance-WSCRA Bob Sharp Environmental Scholarship Fund, Box 371, Graton 95444.

SHARP, Robert W. — Died on February 13, 1999 in a Sebastopol convalescent hospital. A native of Minnesota, a World War II veteran, a U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist, and a leading Sonoma County environmentalist, Bob was a dedicated advocate for the preservation of the rural nature of the west county, serving as long time president of the Western Sonoma County Rural Alliance. He was also a charter director of the foundation designed to study, restore and protect the essential wetlands and wildlife habitat of the Laguna de Santa Rosa. In 1997 he was named the President Emeritus of the Laguna Foundation. He is survived by his wife Dorothy; son, Robert Sharp Jr. of Graton; daughter Catherine Sharp of Graton; and daughter Tina (Mrs. Tim) Reuwsaat of Manassas, Virginia; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He was a gentle man who will be missed by many.

Friends are invited to attend services on Sat. March 6, at 11:00 am at St. Phillip's Catholic Church in Occidental, followed by a reception and a gathering in the church hall. If desired, donations in Bob's memory may be made to the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, PO Box 797, Sebastopol, CA 95473 or to the Bob Sharp Environmental Scholarship Fund, c/o WSCRA PO Box 303 Occidental, CA 95465. Arrangements under the direction of Redwood Funeral Society.

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