

Services held for FVDC co-founder, community leader

Written by Wauneta Breeze

Wednesday, 06 March 2013 22:48 -



Leroy Jussel, long-time Wauneta resident and community leader, passed away Feb. 27. His contributions to Wauneta will live on for years to come thanks to the foresight he and his business partners had for the community. (Courtesy Photo)

By Sheri Hink-Wagner

The Wauneta Breeze

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Wauneta mourns the loss of a long-time leader and icon for the community.

Leroy Jussel, 86, passed away Feb. 27 at the Grand Island Veterans' Home.

The contributions Jussel made for the community will not end with his death.

Jussel and his partner, Bernie Steinert, had the foresight to start Frenchman Valley Development Corporation (FVDC), an organization that will provide for the community's needs for years to come.

Jussel and Steinert had a vision for the community. In 1963 the community's nursing home at the time, the Barnes Nursing Home, was in threat of being closed. The two men and their wives, Bunnie Jussel and Berneta "Bert" Steinert, knew the community needed a nursing home facility and purchased the Barnes Nursing Home.

In 1971 they took it upon themselves to build a new, modern facility to replace the aged Barnes Nursing Home, naming it Kinder Kare.

A Breeze article by G. B. Crapson states, "Kinder Kare Nursing Home will be a \$397,000 project when finished, built and financed. And it is built entirely on a private business enterprise."

The operation was sold in 1983 to Vetter Health Services. Jussel and Steinert paid off their debts and maintained approximately \$100,000 in profit, which they in turn reinvested in the community through the establishment of the Frenchman Valley Development Corporation.

The profit Jussel and Steinert made from the sale of the nursing home continues to care for the community today.

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Since 1983 the Frenchman Valley Development Corporation has reinvested \$91,524.64 into the community by funding projects such as the recent nursing home endeavor, village parks, senior center and community foundation.

As of today, the Frenchman Valley Development Corporation's assets have grown to over \$150,000. FVDC has elected not to spend the principle, only the interest earnings, so funds from interest earnings will be available for community needs for years to come.

"Leroy was a believer in community. He was a business man and believed in giving back to the community," explained his wife, Bunnie.

Jussel's belief in giving back to the community was also evident throughout his life.

Bunnie explained that Leroy's family didn't always have the means to provide for many extras when he was growing up. Therefore, when he and Bunnie owned the Jussel Champlin Station on Tecumseh (where the ambulance barn is today), they never charged a child for a bicycle tire repair.

Bunnie remembers Leroy telling stories of how when he was young and his bicycle would get a flat tire he would have to go looking for bottles to cash in to pay for the repair. She said Leroy never charged to fix a bicycle tire because of his memory of trying to pay for the repairs as a child himself.

Leroy requested that FVDC would help fund the community's Christmas candy for sacks dispersed during Santa Saturday, saying that Christmas was for children. The candy at Christmas continues to be one of FVDC's projects.

Jussel's contributions to the community were not always so easy to see. Bunnie recalls Leroy filling up the propane tank of an older person who could not afford to have it filled. She said he'd simply go by, fill up the tank and never send a bill.

Bunnie said sometimes the individuals would comment on how long the tank had lasted between fills, but Leroy never told them he'd helped them out.

Prior to opening the Jussel Champlin Station Jussel managed the Wauneta Co-op Oil for 13 years. In 1980, when his health began to fail Jussel and Bunnie opened "Pop's Parlor" and sold it one year later.

Retirement didn't suit Jussel well so Bunnie said he was on to the next adventure after selling Pop's Parlor. "Leroy just had to be busy," Bunnie laughed.

So, Jussel bought a fish truck and spent the next two or three years selling shrimp, lobster and all kinds of fish from Broken Bow to Holyoke, Colo. He was forced to give up the fish truck when his rheumatoid arthritis got bad.

Next, Gene Harchelroad asked Jussel to come help him out for "just a few weeks," and Jussel worked as a salesman at Harchelroad Motors for several years until he was forced to quit due to his health.

Jussel and his bride, Bunnie, went together for seven years and were married for 59 years. Bunnie said he was a great husband, remembering all but two of their anniversaries in all that time. They had two children, Steven, who passed away in 2011 and David who lives in Waddell, Ariz.

A full obituary appears inside.