

Longtime Palm Desert City Attorney David Erwin dies

Sherry Barkas, The Desert Sun

David Erwin, Palm Desert's attorney since before the city's incorporation in 1973, has died, his law firm confirmed Monday.

Erwin died Saturday, said Denise Nix, spokeswoman for Best Best & Krieger, where Erwin was a partner. He was 81.

"Dave Erwin was Palm Desert's first and only city attorney. His long and illustrious association with Palm Desert predates the city's existence as he helped to draft the documents that led to our incorporation in 1973," City Manager John Wohlmuth said. "Dave's 42 years of skillful, loyal and dedicated service to Palm Desert is deeply appreciated by all of us who had the privilege of knowing and working with him is one reason that Palm Desert remains such a uniquely wonderful community."

Mayor Pro Tem Bob Spiegel, currently the longest serving member of the City Council with 21 years, echoed Wohlmuth's comments.

"He did an excellent job as our attorney," Spiegel said. "There was never a complaint against him. His (contract) was always renewed by the City Council and there was never anybody who wanted to get rid of him."

Spiegel said Erwin was also a close friend and he had planned to visit Erwin in the hospital Monday afternoon.

"We would go to lunch together and he would listen to me complain ... but never told me what to do," Spiegel said.

Erwin, who lived in Indian Wells, last attended a City Council meeting on Oct. 8.

He died Saturday in a local hospital with his wife, Travis Erwin, and their two grown children, Scott and Stephanie, around him, longtime co-worker and Deputy City Attorney Robert Hargreaves said.

Erwin joined Best Best & Krieger in October 1986, working out of its Indian Wells office. Prior to that, he was with the firm of Erwin, Andelson & Eldred as well as Marsh, Moore & Cologne in the Coachella Valley.

A 1958 graduate of the University of Oklahoma School of Law, Erwin provided legal services to a variety of cities, including Indio, Indian Wells, Rancho Mirage, Desert Hot Springs, Cathedral City and Needles, according to the Best Best & Krieger website.

"Although I never had the privilege to work with Dave, our paths crossed frequently as colleagues," said Steve Quintanilla, city attorney for Rancho Mirage, Desert Hot Springs and Moreno Valley.

"Dave will be remembered as one of the 'greats' among the city attorney community in California.



“He has definitely been a great role model for many city attorneys such as myself. He will be missed by many of us who can only try to follow and fill the huge footprints he has left behind,” Quintanilla said.

The City Council will consider appointing Hargreaves to fill Erwin’s spot, city spokesman David Hermann said. The city’s current contract with Best Best & Krieger expires in 2019, he said.

Hargreaves and Erwin worked together for 30 years.

“He was a mentor to a whole generation of attorneys, including myself,” Hargreaves said Monday. “He was a very gracious person; very personable and always treated people very well. I think I saw him get mad once.”

Erwin, who was also an estate planner, loved being a lawyer and helping people, Hargreaves said, adding that Erwin’s work ethic was unlike that of anyone he’s known.

“People would come to him with all kinds of problems – mostly legal but others as well – and he would help them work through them,” he said.

His health was failing him, but he refused to stop working.

“He wanted to work until he couldn’t anymore,” Hargreaves said.

Erwin grew up in a small town in Oklahoma and moved to the Coachella Valley in the 1950s, Hargreaves said.

He was involved in the community, serving on a variety of boards including the Boys & Girls Clubs of Coachella Valley and the Bob Hope Chrysler Classic -- today the CareerBuilder Challenge.

“Dave was a volunteer on the Board of the Desert Classic Charities and donated his time by giving advice to Eisenhower’s foundation department particularly for planned giving and estate giving. He will be greatly missed,” said Michael Landes, president of the Eisenhower Medical Center Foundation.

A memorial service is planned for 10 a.m. Nov. 20 at St. Margaret’s Episcopal Church in Palm Desert and is open to the public.

<https://www.desertsun.com/story/news/local/palm-desert/2015/11/09/palm-desert-city-attorney-david-erwin-with-best-best--krieg-dies/75465994/>