

ROBERT STAGNARO: 1928-2012

Robert 'Big Boy' Stagnaro dies at 83

Youngest in large family was mainstay at SC Municipal Wharf

By STEPHEN BAXTER

sbaxter@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — A longtime restaurant manager and fixture at the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf, Robert Armand "Big Boy" Stagnaro died Friday morning at his home in Santa Cruz. He was 83.

Stagnaro was the youngest of 13 children and began working at the wharf as a boy. He later co-founded Malio's restaurant — which the family sold in 1979 — and Gilda's restaurant, which he helped manage until a recent illness.

Laura Paz, one of Stagnaro's five children, said Friday that her father died from congestive heart failure and other complications. He had been in the Hospice of Santa Cruz County in Scotts Valley for about six months.

The well-known Stagnaro family has roots on the wharf dating back to the 1870s, and family members Friday said they fielded many calls of condolences.

"We really appreciate all the support from everybody," Paz said. "We're so overwhelmed right now. We just want to give a heartfelt thanks to Santa Cruz

SEE STAGNARO ON A2



STAGNARO

MORE INSIDE

DAN HAIFLEY,
OUR OCEAN
BACKYARD:

Stagnaro family
tradition lives
on, EXTRA, C1

STAGNARO

Continued from A1

County for loving our dad so much."

Robert Stagnaro was born in 1928 at Hanley Hospital, which once stood on West Cliff Drive near Cowell Beach. Born prematurely at roughly 1½ pounds, a nurse at the hospital jested what a "big boy" he was. The nickname stuck.

From there, Robert's young life revolved around the wharf.

Robert drove a "saltwater taxi" from the wharf to sport fishing boats. He also worked as a fish seller and made seafood deliveries across the region.

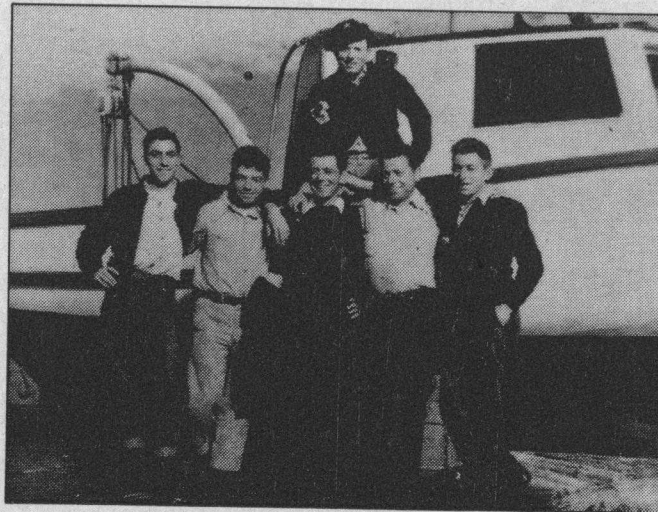
"He grew up in the family's fishing business," said Geoffrey Dunn, Robert's nephew and godson.

"He tried to be upbeat and joyous as much as possible. Like all the Italians on the wharf, he could occasionally get agitated, but for me he was always a steady hand."

During the Korean War, Robert served in the U.S. Navy. He also helped build Miramar Naval Air Station near San Diego and was honorably discharged in 1954, his family said.

He married Joan Brookman and had three boys and two girls. Joan died in 1988.

"My dad just loved people and he loved Santa Cruz, his hometown," said Leta Stagnaro, one of his daughters.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO/STAGNARO FAMILY

Robert 'Big Boy' Stagnaro, far left, stands at the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf in the late 1940s. He is with his uncle, Malio Stagnaro, top, and brothers, from left, Joe, 'Stago,' 'Dodie' and 'Babe.'

He later co-founded Malio's restaurant on the wharf, which he ran with sister Yolanda "Lindy" Stagnaro Dunn. Robert later co-managed Gilda's Restaurant, named for his sister.

Gilda's is part of C. Stagnaro Fishing Co., which is not connected to the Stagnaro Bros. Seafood Inc., also on the wharf.

As he was a fan of Bing Crosby, big band tunes often wafted through the restaurants around Christmas, his family said. Robert had a valuable Bing Crosby collection that included photos and rare vinyl recordings.

He met Crosby at events in Pebble Beach and occasionally gave Bing Crosby presentations at schools. Robert also

was a longtime fan of the New York Yankees.

"He had a beautiful life," said Robert's sister, Lindy Stagnaro Dunn. She turns 97 on Sunday.

She added that Robert was fortunate to pass away as he wanted — at home with his family.

"It seems strange that he's gone and I'm still here."

Geoffrey Dunn said Robert was like a second father to him.

"He and his wife and his cousins always provided me with a sanctuary all my life. I was with him on Wednesday and he grabbed my hand and didn't want me to leave," Geoffrey Dunn said. "He told me how much he loved me."

Robert is survived by his

BIOGRAPHY

ROBERT 'BIG BOY'
STAGNARO

BORN: July 16, 1928

DIED: May 25, 2012

OCCUPATION: Co-manager of Gilda's Restaurant, co-founder of Malio's Restaurant, both on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf

EDUCATION: Santa Cruz High School, class of 1946

MILITARY SERVICE: U.S. Navy 3rd Class aviation storekeeper. Honorably discharged in 1954.

COMMUNITY

INVOLVEMENT: Former president of the Santa Cruz Host Lions Club

SURVIVORS: Sister, Yolanda "Lindy" Stagnaro Dunn; children, Malio Stagnaro, William Stagnaro, Robert "Dino" Stagnaro, Leta Stagnaro and Laura Paz.

SERVICES: A public visitation will be 2-7 p.m. Thursday at Benito & Azzaro Pacific Gardens Chapel, 1050 Cayuga St. in Santa Cruz.

sister and five children: Malio Stagnaro, William Stagnaro, Robert "Dino" Stagnaro, Leta Stagnaro and Laura Paz.

A public visitation is planned for 2-7 p.m. Thursday at Benito & Azzaro Pacific Gardens Chapel, 1050 Cayuga St. in Santa Cruz.

Follow Sentinel reporter Stephen Baxter on Twitter @sbaxter_sc.