

Civic servant Lionel Stoloff dies

By **MARINA MALIKOFF**
Sentinel staff writer

Hours after Rotary Club members signed a get-well card for longtime Santa Cruz civic leader Lionel William Stoloff, they received the news that he had died.

Stoloff, a native of New York City, died of a heart attack Thursday in Cherry Valley. He was 79.

"He gave a lot to the community," said John Lisher, former executive director of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce.

Stoloff steered Lisher toward the post, and on Friday he laughed when he recalled Stoloff's promise that the job would be "a piece of cake."

Stoloff was in a position to know. He held the post from 1975 until

1989, a period fraught with tense moments between the Santa Cruz City Council and the business community, which wanted the homeless out of downtown.

"Some people inhibit the downtown. They have a negative influence. I know they have the same right to enjoy life here as anyone else, but, as someone wrote, the same qualities of life that attract all the bright people and make life special also attract the kooks," Stoloff said in a 1987 Sentinel interview.

While the words are pointed, by all accounts Stoloff was a diplomat with a knack for understanding each side of a dispute and helping fledgling ideas flourish.

"He always helped me out in business decisions," recalled Mel Haber, who worked under Stoloff's

guidance in his early days in the family business, Haber's Furniture, which Stoloff managed for several years.

He was also the voice of reason in personal matters.

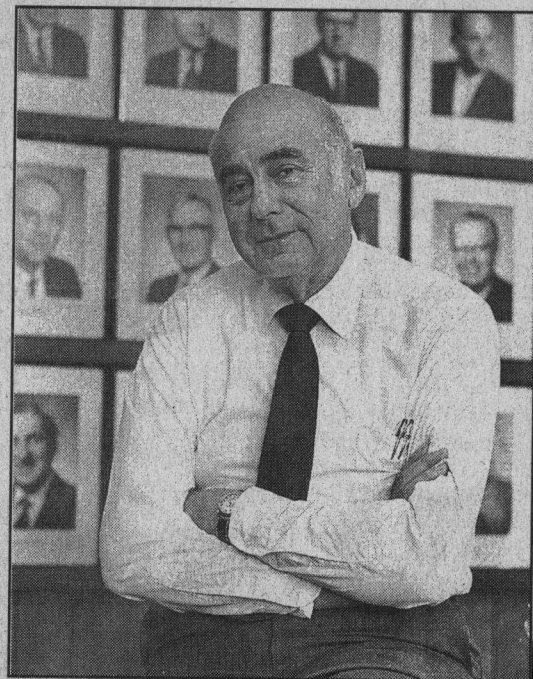
"No matter how agitated you were about problems in business, the community or ones that affected us personally, he always had this calming influence," Haber said.

Stoloff's long list of accomplishments include past president of the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce, county Board of Education,

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Lionel Stoloff, shown in February 1986.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel file



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California Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, UC Santa Cruz Affiliates, Rotary Club of Santa Cruz and Downtown Association of Santa Cruz. He was a founding member of the Greater Santa Cruz Community Foundation and the Santa Cruz County Cultural Steering Committee.

He was also instrumental in bringing the University of California to Santa Cruz.

"He worked tirelessly as a civic leader for the community of Santa Cruz and helped provide a responsible dialog between the business community and the government," said his son, Michael Stoloff. "And he was an avid 49ers fan."

Shortly after he retired from the chamber, Stoloff and his wife Bernice moved to Cherry Valley, a desert retirement community about 20 miles west of Palm Springs, to be closer to his children.

He is survived by wife Bernice Gaines Stoloff of Cherry