

# Philanthropist Alan Simpkins dies at home

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Alan Bain Simpkins, noted philanthropist, high-tech innovator, successful businessman and tireless community activist, died Wednesday at his Santa Cruz home after a short illness. He was 74.

"His passing is a real blow," said Gary Greene, director of Moss Landing Marine Laboratory. "He was a great supporter of education and the oceans."

Known for his modest, low-key style and willingness to listen to others, Mr. Simpkins was indefatigable.

He seemed to be knee-deep, 24-hours-a-day, in every community project imaginable, from being on the boards of several organizations to serving as a Santa Cruz Port District commissioner from 1972 to 1985.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel file

Alan Simpkins and his wife, Phyllis, in 1992 at the new Sports Facility at San Jose State, his alma mater and one of his favorite causes.

## Simpkins dies

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"Alan was an incredibly enthusiastic and generous person toward everything he became involved with," said Julie Packard of the Monterey Bay Aquarium and daughter of David Packard, co-founder of Silicon Valley giant Hewlett-Packard.

"He truly believed in community involvement and philanthropy as a human value," said Packard, who knew Mr. Simpkins much of her life.

One of Mr. Simpkins' favorite causes was his alma mater, San Jose State University. He and his wife, Phyllis Simpkins, donated about \$6 million to SJSU in the last decade, said Janet Redding, vice president of university advancement.

Mr. Simpkins once told her that because he was raised in San Jose and his family could not afford to send him off to college, he "would not have had an opportunity to go to college at all" if it hadn't been for SJSU.

Another of his favorite projects was the Live Oak Swim Center, which was renamed the Simpkins Family Swim Center after he donated more than \$200,000 to build the pool. He and his family also helped raise the rest of the money needed to get construction under way. The Olympic-size pool is scheduled to open next Memorial Day.

"He really cared about making opportunities for kids in our community," said Tom Burns, county Redevelopment Agency administrator. "He was generous, gracious and humble at the same time."

Mr. Simpkins was also sentimental. Several years ago, he bought and restored a 1939 Pontiac sedan, because it brought back memories of his youth and his romance with his wife.

Born March 17, 1923, he served in the Army Signal Corps during World War II. In 1946, he married Phyllis A. Forward of San Jose. Two years later, he earned his bachelor's degree in physics at San Jose State College.

During the next 45 years, Mr. Simpkins designed, developed and marketed numerous test instruments for the telephone industry. He founded two successful telecommunications corporations and served on the board of directors of many more. He held five patents, all in telecommunications.

In 1960, he founded Delcon Corp. in Palo Alto, a manufacturer of telephone test equipment, and created several industry standards. In 1965, he sold Delcon to Hewlett-Packard, but stayed on as the general manager of the Delcon Division of HP for three years.

Mr. Simpkins then co-founded Dynatel Corp. in Mountain View in 1970, and developed telephone company cable test equipment. At the end of the decade, Mr. Simpkins and his partners sold Dynatel to 3M Co. Dynatel remains a division of 3M.

Mr. Simpkins also served on the board of directors from 1961 to 1989 of Plantronics Inc. of Santa Cruz, a leading maker of telephone headsets and related mate-

rials. He also was trustee for 10 years for the Monterey Bay Aquarium.

He loved to sail, and he loved the sea. He owned a 50-foot sailboat, "Zanthippe" for 30 years. He was commodore of the Santa Cruz Yacht Club in 1969. He participated in the biannual Transpac Yacht Race from California to Hawaii in 1969, 1971 and 1975 with his children. He spearheaded the purchase and the restoration of "Angelita," the U.S. yachting 1936 Olympic gold medal winner, donating the boat to the 1984 Olympic Games in Los Angeles.

He was a member of Junior Achievement in 1965; Friends of Long Marine Laboratory; Greater Santa Cruz County Community Foundation, board member and treasurer, 1985 to 1990; and Cabrillo College Foundation.

He won the following awards: honorary doctorate of Humane Letters, SJSU, 1996; Paul Harris Fellow, Watsonville Rotary Club, 1993; SJSU Distinguished Honors Convocation, 1982.

He served as president of the SJSU Alumni Association from 1993 to 1995. He was a visiting professor at SJSU in 1994. He was president of the Spartan Foundation from 1980 to 1982.

Along with Mrs. Simpkins, he won the following awards: Spartan Foundation, Support for Athletic Programs; SJSU International Center, Dedicated Service Award, 1983; California State University Philanthropist of the Year, 1989. The couple also won numerous Cultural Council of Santa Cruz County awards.

The couple made multimillion-dollar donations to: the SJSU Simpkins Stadium Center; the SJSU Alan B. Simpkins Intercollegiate Athletics Administration Center; and the SJSU Phyllis Forward Simpkins International Center.

He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Phyllis Simpkins of Santa Cruz; two sons, Bob and Bill Simpkins of Santa Cruz; a daughter, Diane Bordoni of Los Altos; a sister, Patricia Lowe of Santa Rosa; and seven grandchildren.

A celebration of his life will be 2 p.m. Sept. 21 at his Schwan Lake residence. For more information, call 475-5777.

Contributions are preferred to Humanities and Arts Alumni, SJSU Marching Band, 1 Washington Square, San Jose, Calif. 95192; or Hospice Caring Project of Santa Cruz County, 6851 Soquel Drive, Aptos, Calif. 95003.

On Sept. 7 of this year, the SJSU marching band, which Mr. Simpkins is credited with saving in the 1970s, visited his home. The 50-member band marched in full uniform up to the Simpkins residence and performed several of his favorite pieces, including "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," and the band's recent SJSU/Stanford University halftime show.

Jerry Fitzgerald of Pasatiempo said Wednesday of his longtime friend: "He was just a great guy for a community to have."