

Mourners bid Belgard farewell



A crowd watches a video presentation featuring Ray Belgard during a memorial service at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds on Tuesday. Belgard, a former county supervisor and Watsonville police chief, died March 1. He was 76. Kate Falconer/Sentinel photos

Bio-P
**Former supervisor,
 top cop remembered
 as a man whose life
 was about 'giving'**

By **DONNA JONES**
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WATSONVILLE

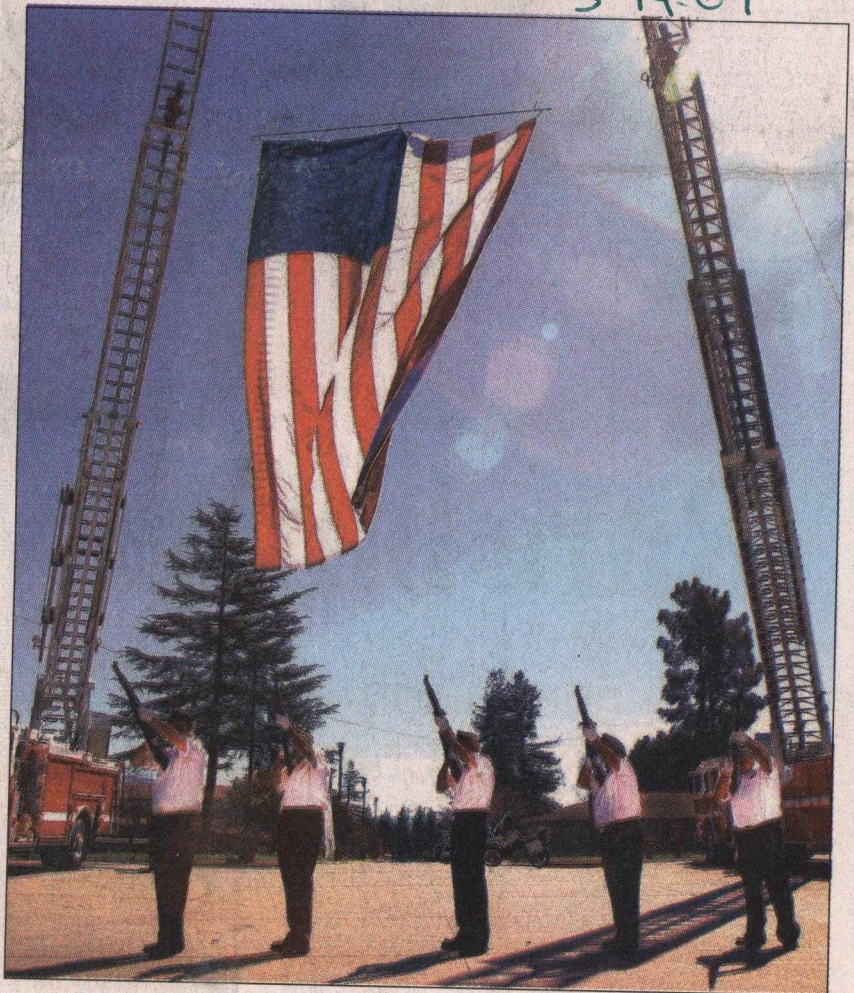
✓ If there was any doubt about the impact of Ray Belgard's life on the community, Tuesday's memorial for the former Watsonville police chief and Santa Cruz County supervisor dispelled it.

Hundreds, including many of the county's most influential and powerful, packed the Crosetti Building at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds to pay tribute to a man who was remembered for decades of public service, renowned for his kindness and integrity.

Outside, an 11-by-16-foot flag hung suspended between the ladders of trucks from Watsonville and North Monterey County fire departments. Inside, motorcycles and police cars from Salinas and Watsonville police departments and the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office were on display.

"Ray was about giving," said Tony Campos, who succeeded Belgard as supervisor. "He never took. His reward for all he did in life was knowing he did the right thing."

As a supervisor, Belgard championed projects from flood control to affordable housing.



Salinas Memorial VFW Post 7895 members prepare their guns for a salute at the closing of the memorial service for Ray Belgard at the Santa Cruz County Fairgrounds on Tuesday.

Belgard

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After he left office, he frequently contacted Campos for help with other people's problems. The only time he ever asked anything for himself was to be appointed to Pajaro Valley Cemetery District board, a post few might want. But the board needed Belgard's help, Campos said.

Belgard started his 46 years of public service as a police officer in Salinas and later as an inspector in the Monterey County District Attorney's Office.

Monterey County District Attorney Dean Flippo said during Belgard's 13-year tenure in criminal justice there, he earned respect working on the prosecutions of tough cases. After he left in 1967 to take a job with the Santa Cruz County D.A.'s Office, he maintained relationships, he said. Belgard was the person you could go to for advice, a confidant.

Retired appellate court justice Chris Cottle recalled coming to the Santa Cruz County District Attorney's Office fresh out of law school. He knew nothing about law enforcement, and Belgard taught him "much of what I learned."

Belgard was new, too, coming to work as chief inspector for District Attorney Peter Chang, who was newly elected with a mandate for change. It was a time of upheaval, from protests against the Vietnam War to a series of grisly murders, and Belgard brought invaluable

experience, knowledge and diplomatic skills, Cottle said.

Cottle also played golf with Belgard, for years. But it wasn't Belgard's prowess on the course, he remembered, but rather the affection shown Belgard by the opposite sex. Wherever they played — Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Benito, Tahoe — women came up and hugged Belgard, Cottle said.

"He holds the record — and it will never be broken — for the most hugs from women the rest of us did not know," he said.

Watsonville Police Chief Terry Medina talked about Belgard's years as the city's top cop. He took over in 1982 when the department was struggling with morale and funding issues. Belgard, working with then City Manager John Radin, secured money to update equipment. He built an esprit d' corps by implementing such policies as annual inspections.

Then, in 1985, cannery workers launched what would be an 18-month strike. Protests became weekend events. Cannery owners pressured Radin to fire Belgard for not doing enough. The union representing workers filed a lawsuit against Belgard and Medina personally.

"He called it the most difficult career of his life, not just his career, but his life," Medina said.

But years later, people reflected more favorably on the Police Department's performance.

"(People) would say, 'I was caught up in the moment. You did as good a job as you could to keep the peace,'" Medina said.

Medina said after Belgard's death, Belgard's daughter, Jody Belgard-Akimoto, found a scrap of yellowed paper, creased from years of folding and unfolding. Opening it she found a poem, which Medina read. Two lines summed up the sentiment: "I want to go out with my head erect. I want to deserve all men's respect."

During a lunch afterward, others spoke more informally about Belgard.

Harry Bloom graduated from Watsonville High School in 1947, a year ahead of Belgard, but the two men were nearly lifelong friends. He recalled a trip he, Belgard and another friend made 50 years ago to Mexico in a 1949 two-door Mercury. Later, Belgard served as best man at Bloom's wedding.

"Every time we'd run into him, he'd say 'See, I'm still the best man,'" Bloom said. "He was just fun. He was just easy, easy to be with."

Leona Hanson, Belgard's and now Medina's secretary at the Police Department, was a young mother of two when she first met Belgard. She was single, new to America from India and without family, and in her first job.

She had "many precious memories" and told about the time he showed up to help her move, bringing his police captains along.

"He was there for me every step of the way," Hanson said. "He was a man above all men I have known, a leader and a friend."

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