

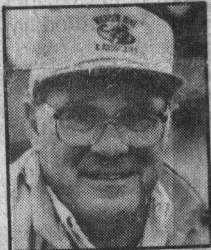
Bob Manfre dies Watsonville loses a top civic leader

By **CHUCK HILDEBRAND**
Sentinel staff writer

WATSONVILLE — In one respect, the last hours of Bob Manfre's life weren't much different than the previous 67 years: He found time for everybody.

"When the family was at the house Saturday night, it was like he was giving everyone their last instructions and making sure ev-

erything was taken care of," Manfre's son, John, said Monday. "It was a great family scene, and it was indicative of his personality. He was the kind of guy who took care of everything and everybody."



Manfre

Bob Manfre, who died Sunday from cancer at his Pajaro Dunes home, was a 40-year partner in Frank Capurro & Son, one of the West Coast's most successful vegetable grower-distributors and one of the Pajaro Valley's major employers since it was founded in the 1920s.

But he never had trouble finding time for people and causes outside his business.

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Bob Manfre

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Sensing the area needed a bank that would help small businesses, he helped found one. He helped start Watsonville's Little League baseball program in the early 1950s. He served on school boards while his children were growing up, and helped lead the unsuccessful fight to save the high school his sons attended.

He belonged to numerous service clubs, including the Elks Club of Watsonville and the now-defunct 20-30 Club, of which he was president during the late 1950s. From 1982-90, he served on the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, to which he was appointed by then-Gov. George Deukmejian.

"You wouldn't see his name or his family's name on the front cover of anything," said Peter Barr of Sunbay Co., a friend of the Manfre family for more than 20 years. "If you see something about an anonymous donor or giver of time, he'd always seem to be there, whether it's a women's shelter or the (rebuilding of) St. Patrick's Church or the need of having a small bank.

"To me he was very unusual. Very few people can tell you to your face what they think about you or your actions without offending you. He spoke his mind clearly and plainly, but he would do it in a way that was feeling and yet dispassionate."

Manfre, a native of Medford, Mass., moved to Watsonville in 1948 after service in the U.S. Army during World War II and three years in college. His first job here was at Bank of America.

"Right away he spotted the need in this valley for a bank that would help the smaller businesses," Barr said.

Many years later, that led to his being a founding director of the Pajaro Valley Bank, which later became the First National Bank of Central California.

Manfre left banking in 1951 and went to work for Frank Capurro & Son, becoming a partner in 1954. By that time, he had joined the Elks and the 20-30 Club and was involved in the community in earnest.

The 20-30 Club helped found Watsonville's Little League program, and Manfre for many years managed the 20-30 Club's entry, the Braves.

"He wanted them to be called the Braves because our family was from near Boston," said Bill Manfre, Bob's brother. "They had

just moved (from Boston to Milwaukee, in 1953) and I guess he wanted to start his own dynasty here."

Manfre was a member of the school boards of Mora Central High School in Watsonville and of the Monterey Diocesan School Board. In the late 1960s, the diocese decided to close both Mora (where Manfre's sons attended) and Holy Cross High in Santa Cruz. Holy Cross closed in 1969, Mora in 1970.

"He did his best to try to keep those schools open," said John Manfre, who was in Mora's last graduating class. "He was a man of principles, and he always stood by them."

In addition to his work at Capurro & Son, he found time to indulge another of his passions: golf. He belonged to the Pajaro Valley Men's Club at the Pajaro Valley Golf Course, the Salinas Golf & Country Club, the Professional Golf Association West in La Quinta, and the Western Italian Golf Association. He also helped start the Father Kelly Golf Tournament, benefitting the needy in the Pajaro Valley.

"He was able to do a lot of things that he wanted to do," John Manfre said, "but he was working right up to the end. He never retired."

Manfre is survived by his wife of 44 years, Shirley, of Watsonville; sons Mike, John and Gary Manfre, all of Watsonville; daughter Denise Leach, of Aptos; his twin brother, Richard Manfre of Hollister; another brother, William Manfre of Watsonville; his brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Bud and Betty Capurro of Watsonville; his sisters, Beverly Vansandt and Jeri Hawsey, both of Watsonville; his father, Hugo Manfre of Watsonville; seven grandchildren, and numerous nieces, nephews and godchildren.

Friends may call today from noon to 9 p.m. at Mehl's Colonial Chapel, 222 E. Lake Ave., Watsonville.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be Wednesday at 11 a.m. at Valley Catholic Church, 2401 E. Lake Ave., Watsonville. Entombment will follow at Valley Catholic Cemetery.

Donations to the Ear of the Lion Foundation, 20432 Silverado Ave., Suite 3, Cupertino, Calif. 95014; the American Cancer Society, 209 Walnut Ave., Santa Cruz, Calif. 95060; Sansum Medical Research, 2219 Bath St., Santa Barbara, Calif. 93102; or to a favorite charity are preferred.