

Samuel Leask III, SC Leader, Dies

Samuel Leask III, one of Santa Cruz County's most distinguished citizens and a member of a longtime local merchandising family, died this morning at Dominican Hospital.

Leask, 61, had been ill for some time and hospitalized for the past month.

Since his return to his hometown in 1948 to assume personal operation of Leask's as general manager, Leask maintained his family's extraordinary history of civic and business leadership.

He later became president of Leask's, the family department store founded by his grandfather in 1892.

Then he began an exceptional career of civic leadership, serving on the Santa Cruz City Council, with the Chamber of Commerce, in the Downtown Association, United Way and numerous other activities which often disrupted his hobby of sailing.

He was a member of the Santa Cruz City Council in 1964, served as mayor in 1967 (his maternal grandfather Dr. T.W. Drullard served three terms as mayor).

Leask resigned from the council in 1969 after being re-elected in 1968.

But his public service continued as he headed the Joint Powers Authority, formed in the hopes of building a convention center here, headed the city off-street parking commission and served on the



Samuel Leask III

County Water Resources Coordinating commission.

Later he served as president of the Downtown Association.

He was president of the California Retailers Association, a retail business group which his father, Samuel Leask Jr., helped form.

Leask also served as chairman of the Blue Cross of Northern California and was honored by the California State Chamber of Commerce as businessman of the month in 1977.

He was the Santa Cruz "Young Man of the Year" in 1953 and in 1969 was named Chamber of Commerce "Man of the Year," one of the few citizens ever named for both honors.

In addition to operating the family department store, Leask served on the board of directors of the old Farmers and Merchants National Bank and later was named to the board of directors of the County Bank of Santa Cruz. He also was a director of the Santa Cruz Seaside Co.

He was a graduate of Santa Cruz High School, later attended the University of Santa Clara and was graduated from the University of Southern California after service in the Army during World War II.

He worked for several department stores before returning to Santa Cruz in 1948, including the May Co. and later was an executive with the Broadway stores (now Carter, Hawley Hale).

He was a long time member of the Santa Cruz Rotary Club. His hobbies were sailing and hunting. He served as commodore of the Santa Cruz Yacht Club and also as a grand juror.

His grandfather, Samuel Leask founded Leask's. His father, Samuel Leask Jr., was general manager here before going to southern California where he maintained the public service tradition as heading the OPA office there in World War II, later became chief administrative officer for

the city of Los Angeles and later served as a director in the state administration of Gov. Edmund G. Brown.

Word of Leask's death was met with sorrow by Santa Cruz political and business leaders.

"Sam has made many contributions in many areas for the betterment of the city. He gave unselfishly of his time and energy to make a better community for us all and we're certainly going to miss that," said Mayor Joe Ghio.

Flags at city facilities were lowered to half-staff this morning in memory of Leask.

Lionel Stoloff, manager of the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce, said of Leask's death: "With the passing of Sam, we're seeing an end of an era."

Stoloff said he knew Leask as a businessman, a competitor and a civic leader. "He was a dedicated, sensitive man. The well-being of the community always was uppermost in his mind. He was a very effective man who said very little, but who could always be counted on to do the right thing," said Stoloff.

"You could sum up what he was by saying he was a perfect gentleman," Stoloff added.

Chamber President Wally Dale termed Leask a "pillar of the community. His advice was taken by the people in the business environment. He was a very strong asset to the community and we're going to miss him."

Leask is survived by his wife, Mary; a son, Samuel Leask IV of Leask's; a daughter, Katherine Ann Mitchell of Tacoma, Wash.; his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Leask Jr. of Los Angeles, two uncles, James and Haswell Leask of Santa Cruz and an aunt.

Services are pending at White's Chapel.