'He knew what was right' Former SC building official voiced quake concerns before deadly temblor

By DARREL W. COLE

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — In 1987, David Steeves took on the business community and the city's elected officials, warning that if city buildings weren't remodeled to withstand an earthquake, lives would be lost and the damage would be catastrophic.

Steeves, the city's chief building official at the time, lost his battle to politicians and business owners, who said the costs would

put merchants out of business.

Steeves then retired out of frustration and for health reasons. Less than two years later his warnings proved true as the Loma Prieta earthquake destroyed 27 of the 46 buildings he had warned about. Collapsing buildings killed three.

Steeves died Tuesday. 23 days after the earthquake's 10th anniversary. He died of heart failure at Dominican Hospital. He was

People who knew him and worked with him said he was a man of conviction who often butted heads with city leaders and businesses.

"He loved his work and cared about it not just for the buildings that went up, but for the people he dealt with," said Sue Steeves. his former wife and lifelong friend who cared for him his last few years. "It wasn't easy for him, but he knew what was right."

She said his true character was most evident during a tumultuous few months when he closed the Louden Nelson Center in 1986 because of a report the building would collapse in the event of an earthquake. Shock and anger greeted the decision because the building served as a hub of activity for many organizations and activities.

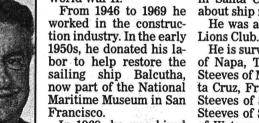
Sue Steeves said the criticism hurt him.

but he knew lives were at stake.

"He kept things mostly at the office, but once in a while, like with the Louden Nelson closing, you could see it affected him." Sue Steeves said. "I remember at one point there was a phone call for him and he said. 'Just tell them I'm in Hawaii.' He was laughing, but he cared so much ... and enough to keep at it, and stand by his convictions. David's thing wasn't about the costs but about the people."

Steeves was a member of the U.S. Coast Guard from 1941 to 1946 and served in Alaska, Africa and the South Pacific during

World War II.



In 1969, he was hired as the chief building official for Santa Cruz County. He moved to the same

After his retirement. he ran for the City Council in 1988, finishing ninth in a field of 17 candidates.

After retiring, he headed a nonprofit dedicated to preparing the community for natural disasters.

In his honor, a Sea Scout ship was named

the SSS Steeves. He had been a member of the group while growing up in San Francisco and later worked with the organization in Santa Cruz, passing on his knowledge about ship maintenance.

He was also a member of the Santa Cruz

He is survived by sons David A Steeves Jr. bor to help restore the of Napa, Timothy D. Steeves, Thomas M. Steeves of Martinez. Donald Rossini of Santa Cruz, Frank Rossini of Carmel and Ron Maritime Museum in San Steeves of Santa Cruz: daughters Elena M. Steeves of Santa Cruz, Peggy Lee Terronez of Watsonville, Mary Ann Grimes of Concord. Carolyn Begley of Kentucky and Merry Gaborit of Seattle: sister Shirley Steeves Jones of San Lorenzo; and numerous grandposition for the city in children, nieces and nephews.

A memorial is scheduled for 3 p.m. today at Santa Cruz Bible Church Youth Center, 440 Frederick St. His ashes will be spread

at sea at a later date.

Arrangements are under the direction of Norman's Family Chapel in Soquel.

Contributions are preferred to the Sea Scouts.



Steeves Retired in 1987 as city's chief building official