

Friends remember community stalwart

Longtime educator, city
councilman dies at age 91

By Calvin Men

calvinmen@santacruzsentinel.com
@calvinmenatwork on Twitter

SANTA CRUZ » Arnie Levine, a pillar of the Santa Cruz Jewish community who was a staunch believer and advocate of the public schools he taught in, died in his Santa Cruz home Thursday.

He was 91.

Born on Jan. 29, 1924, Levine grew up in his native Brooklyn, New York, and attended Brooklyn College. Levine moved to Santa Cruz in 1947, attending San Jose State to earn his master's degree in education.

Among the issues Levine touched were Santa Cruz's political arena, the Jewish community and education.

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"To say he was a pillar of the community sounds cliché but anybody who's been in this community for any period of time would go, 'Oh yeah.' Just because he had done so much and he just so believed in this town," said Joy Spodick, Levine's daughter.

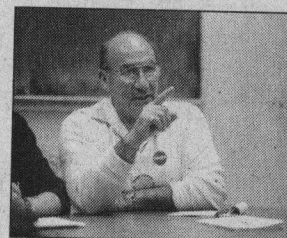
Levine was a local fixture in the education scene as a teacher at Branciforte Middle School and the assistant principal at Harbor High School. Levine instituted the Santa Cruz County Spelling Bee and coordinated it for a number of years. He also spearheaded the Santa Cruz Sentinel Newspaper in Education program, which put newspapers in the hands of students.

"Arnie was my high school principal during a period of time when I would cut my last class of the day to go to the Sentinel and fold newspapers in the afternoon, so he was always chasing me down for truancy," said Mardi Browning, circulation and marketing director of the Sentinel. "Many moons later, he was one my first hires as circulation director, and that interview made me more nervous than him."

Over the years he led thousands of students on field trips through the Sentinel.

"He was a tireless supporter of public education," said Michael Watkins, superintendent of Santa Cruz County schools. "I think the legacy he left in my mind was that public education is of high quality in Santa Cruz County. He wanted to impart that message."

He was a member organizations throughout the community, including the Santa Cruz Elks Lodge, the Lions Club and the Santa Cruz Chamber of Commerce. But much of his time was



DAN COYRO — SANTA CRUZ SENTINEL FILE

Arnie Levine debates Gary Patton at UC Santa Cruz in May of 1986.

devoted to developing and growing Temple Beth El, which his family helped establish in 1954.

"He was one of the pillars of the temple and the wider Santa Cruz Jewish community," said senior Rabbi Richard Litvak.

In the years before the synagogue had its own rabbi, Levine served as the lay interim, Litvak said. He added Levine's devotion to Judaism and tradition inspired others in the temple.

At the time, there was a small Jewish community, Rabbi Paula Marcus said.

"I would imagine for many years, when people would think of someone who was Jewish, they would think of Arnie," she said.

He was revered in the temple and, for the better part of the previous three decades, recited a poem during a ceremony as part of Yom Kippur, Marcus said.

"He always read it with his booming beautiful voice," she said. "It felt like when Arnie read his piece, then the service was complete."

His voice and dedication found its way into the political scene when Levine served as a city council member from 1983 to 1988. He brought his dedication and enthusiasm for the city there, said California Secretary for Natural Resources John Laird, who served on the City Council with Levine.

"If he had a problem when he was on City Council, it's that he was friends with people on all sides of the issues,"

ARNOLD 'ARNIE' LEVINE

Born: Jan. 29, 1924

Died: April 16, 2015

Occupation: Teacher at Branciforte Middle School and assistant principal at Harbor High School

Education: Master's degree in education from San Jose State

Community Involvement: One of the founding members of Temple Beth El and Santa Cruz City councilman from 1983-1988

Survivors: He is survived by his wife, Estelle; his son, Mitchell (Kristen); daughter, Joy (David); daughter-in-law, Deborah; brother, Saul (Joyce); seven grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.

Services: A memorial service will be at noon Monday at Temple Beth El, 3055 Porter Gulch Road in Aptos. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Rose Levine Youth Campership Fund at the temple.

Laird said. "Friendship was very important to him and it was very difficult to work on issues in which he had close friends on all sides."

Laird said he remembers several occasions where Levine, who was known for gesturing, knocked several things off the table at City Council meetings.

"It was because he was so exuberant. He was excited about it. He would gesture. He would be into it."

At home, he was a role model to his three kids.

Joy Spodick, his daughter, said her father embodied generosity.

"The old expression, 'He'd give you the shirt off his back.' Well, I've seen him do that," she said.

She saw her father's influence on a regular basis as students, children of students and even grandchildren of students came through his schools.

"There were people that

would come up to him and say, 'You had my grandfather as a student,' and he would say, 'Oh my God, I'm older than dirt,' Spodick said.

Levine is preceded in death by his parents, Rose and Charles Levine; his brother, Harvey Levine; and his son, Mark Levine. He is survived by his wife, Estelle; his son, Mitchell (Kristen); daughter, Joy (David); daughter-in-law, Deborah; brother, Saul (Joyce); seven grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.