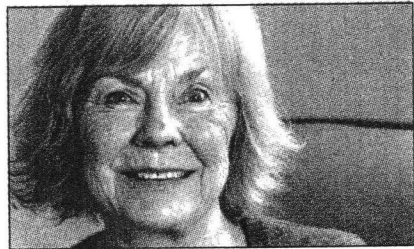


MARDI WORMHOUDT: 1937-2009

Icon of progressive politics dies

Bio-W *10.22.09*
Former mayor, supervisor ushered city through quake



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

Former Santa Cruz Mayor and Supervisor
Mardi Wormhoudt died Wednesday.

By WALLACE BAINE
wbaine@santacruzsentinel.com

SANTA CRUZ — Mardi Wormhoudt, an iconic figure in Santa Cruz's progressive politics, died Wednesday at her Westside home. She was 72.

Wormhoudt, the city's mayor during the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989 and

a former county supervisor, had been suffering from advanced stages of melanoma and was unable to attend the commemoration of Loma Prieta on Saturday, where public officials evoked her name and praised her efforts in bringing the city back from the quake.

She was known as a committed political fighter who inspired both fierce loyal-

ties and strong opposition, and who left a legacy of slow-growth development and women's and civil rights as a city councilwoman and for 12 years as the 3rd District county supervisor.

"She was a person who aroused strong passions in people because she was prin-

AS WE SEE IT:
Wormhoudt was the right woman for her times.
EDITORIAL,
A9

SEE WORMHOUDT ON A2



SHMUEL THALER/SENTINEL FILE

Mardi Wormhoudt finds a rare private moment to reflect as she takes a break on Pacific Avenue from her duties as mayor of Santa Cruz a few days after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

WORMHOUDT

Continued from A1

ciplend, strategic and very effective," said John Laird, a former Assemblyman who served on the City Council with Wormhoudt. "If you happened to agree with her on the issue, you could thank your lucky stars. If you didn't, you were in trouble."

Laird and Wormhoudt first ran for the City Council in 1981 and, with sitting Councilmen Bruce Van Allen and Mike Rotkin, they turned the council to a progressive majority. She served three terms as mayor before moving on to the Board of Supervisors.

"She fought for those who might be marginalized," Laird said, "from the kids of juvenile hall to reform juvenile-justice practices in the county, to programs for women who were incarcerated."

Andy Schiffrin, who worked for Wormhoudt on the Board of Supervisors, said she was "straightforward in a political context and really personable in less political situations."

He also said she was tireless in advocating for her central issues. "She had a very deep connection with social-justice issues," Schiffrin said.

Born Mardi Rolfs in Wisconsin, Wormhoudt came to Santa Cruz in the mid-1970s, having moved with her husband Ken and her children from Southern California, where she served as a social worker during the late 1960s. She had been active in the civil rights and anti-war movements of the time.

"She saw the big picture," said longtime friend and colleague Rotkin. "But she was also a really hard worker in the trenches."

She emerged in the 1980s as one of the first prominent female politicians in Santa Cruz and quickly developed a reputation for strong, blunt-spoken advocacy, which delighted her backers and often infuriated her opponents.

"She was a real trailblazer for women," Laird said. "When we were first elected, she was the only woman on the City Council. When we had to go meet in closed sessions with city officials, she was the only woman in the room."

"She was a strong-minded individual

MARDI WORMHOUDT

BORN: Oct. 1, 1937

DIED: Oct. 21, 2009

HOME: Santa Cruz

OCCUPATION: Former three-term Santa Cruz mayor, two-term city councilwoman, and 3rd District county supervisor.

EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in philosophy, Cal State Los Angeles (1967)

SURVIVORS: Sons Jonathan, Jacob, Zachary and daughter Lisa.

SERVICES: To be announced.

who did not suffer fools gladly," said Sentinel Editor Don Miller, who covered Wormhoudt's term on the City Council as a city hall reporter and as the paper's city editor. "As mayor, she certainly did some controversial things, and many people were surprised by her ability to get things done, particularly after the earthquake. But Santa Cruz's downtown is a testament to that today."

Wormhoudt found herself at the center of Santa Cruz history when she was mayor during Loma Prieta. Her actions in mobilizing the city's staff, helping create the Vision Santa Cruz task force and spurring on reconstruction of the downtown brought an often fractious City Council together.

"That earthquake experience was such an ordeal for her," Santa Cruz City Manager Dick Wilson said. "And she was just extraordinary during that time."

In her time on the Board of Supervisors, Wormhoudt focused on reform of the county's juvenile justice system and counted those efforts among her proudest achievements.

But she was also a master at keeping the political and the personal two separate realms. Councilman Rotkin said he and Wormhoudt found themselves on opposite sides of the Coast Santa Cruz Hotel expansion during Wormhoudt's term as supervisor. But, he said, it never affected their relationship as friends.

Tom Honig was the editor of the Sentinel during much of Wormhoudt's

political career. Honig and Wormhoudt often clashed on issues, but remained close friends.

"When she left the board, everyone assumed that Mardi was this kind of iron lady," said Honig, "that she was this one-dimension politician who didn't have a private life. In fact, she had so much going on in her private life that, at that point, she really wanted to be free of the political responsibilities."

Those close to her said Wormhoudt led a rich life. Her Westside home boasted of fine gardens. She was always well-dressed.

"She had style," Rotkin said.

She loved West Cliff Drive. She read widely, loved to travel and cook, and was a big fan of popular music.

"She was also one of the funniest people you would ever come across," Honig said.

Wormhoudt is survived by her sons Zachary, Jonathan and Jacob and daughter Lisa. Her husband, landscape architect Ken Wormhoudt, died in 1997.

Friends say she worked hard to maintain a fulfilling family life and drew unambiguous lines between her private and public lives.

"She was at home during the earthquake," Laird said, "because she had this inviolate rule to be home for dinner every night with her family."

Laird remembered visiting Wormhoudt at her home during her tenure as supervisor. She was taking care of her young grandson at the time.

"They were playing with this train set and having a great old time. But they were missing one piece of track. And I was amazed watching this, she was one of the most powerful people in the county and all she cared about at that moment was finding that piece of track."

But her enduring influence may be those she inspired while in political office.

"Mardi had fanatical followers," Rotkin said. "She knew how to build support. It wasn't all about making fancy speeches with her. She'd make that great speech, but then she'd do the hard stuff, sitting down with people who didn't go along with her and persuade them, get everyone moving. She just didn't let her people down."