

Remembering former Coral Springs Mayor Ben Geiger

Otis Benjamin "Ben" Geiger, one of the most influential politicians of Coral Springs' early years and a key person in the growth of the city, died at his home in Margate last week.

Geiger, who was 77, is survived by his wife Phyllis "Phiz" Geiger, four children – Robin Geiger, Otis Benjamin Geiger II, Penny Onorato, and Terri Slaugenhaupt – seven grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. He was suffering from emphysema and had been bedridden for the last two months of his life.

Geiger, who served 16 years as mayor, vice mayor and commissioner, was first elected in 1974. Coral

Ridge Properties controlled the city in its early years, and it was Geiger who began the task of making Coral Springs independent.

"Back then, there were no city taxes," Geiger told the Coral Springs Forum in an interview earlier this year. "I told residents that if they elected me, I would tax them. I won the election and in my first year as mayor, we introduced city taxes. Coral Ridge Properties didn't like it, but they didn't fight it."

"It was one the greatest adventures of my life," Geiger said of his years on the commission. "My happiest memories are of the people I worked with. Watching the city grow

and being a part of it was an awesome feeling."

Geiger considered Coral Springs as part of his family, Robin said. "I cannot begin to tell you how much pride he felt for the city. Every time we drove into the city, he would have a smile on his face. Family was very important to him and Coral Springs was part of the family. For me, his greatest achievement was keeping Coral Springs a family-oriented city."

"He always had time for us," Robin said. "We moved from Delray Beach

to the city because dad wanted the best education for us. I was 13 when he was first elected mayor. I remember going door to door with him, meeting people and making friends. It was phenomenal. He never took any decision on his political [career] without first discussing it with us."

"He was very outspoken and when he wanted something, he usually went for it," Phiz said. "But I don't think the man had an enemy in the world. He was a very personable,

friendly person. He made a lot of friends; for a few years, we sent out 400 Christmas cards."

"Ben functioned from the heart and it was a big one," said Judy Wilson, who owned the Coral Springs Forum in the 70s. "He had an infectious smile and a loud laugh and people were attracted to his obvious affection for his job. He was also very opinionated and didn't mind sharing his thoughts."

"In my many years covering municipal government, I don't know anyone who enjoyed being a major as much as Ben," Wilson said. "It was more than the prestige of the job, it was being in a position to

be totally immersed in the city's well being... He served with both enthusiasm and humility."

Geiger was born in Miami and graduated from the University of Florida in 1956, with a Bachelor's degree in construction.

The burial service was at Forest Lawn Funeral Home in Pompano Beach. This was followed by a celebration of life at The Country Club of Coral Springs on the same day.

"Ben believed he was truly blessed," Phiz said. "Some time ago, he said that he wanted us to celebrate his life after he went. He wanted us to have fun, with balloons all around and with music playing. He didn't want us sad."



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