

Educator Ernie Owen dies at age 81

By **DAVID JAMES HEISS**
Staff Writer

All through Claire Grenfell's athletic career at Rim of the World High School, there isn't a single tennis match, soccer game or track meet she competed in that wasn't attended by her grandfather, Lester "Ernie" Owen.

Owen, a former school teacher and principal for several Redlands schools, died Nov. 19 due to complications from Alzheimer's. He was 81.



Ernie Owen
1926-2007

In the early years of the war, he experienced some of the worst of it in France.

His unit, the 26th Infantry Division, was attacked outside of

He retired from Langley Air Force Base in 1965, after working there as a photo interpreter.

During his time in the service he attained the rank of technical

OWEN

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"He was the kindest person I've ever met," said Grenfell, who attends San Francisco State University. "He was a die-hard sports fan. I can't remember any of my sporting events that he didn't attend. He was someone who always went out of his way to do things for others."

Owen was a loyal Redlands High School Terrier fan, and followed athletics at the University of Redlands as well, where he received his teaching credential and master's degree in education.

Owen taught sixth-grade in 1951 at Lugonia Elementary School (now Orangewood High School), later serving as its principal. He was also a principal at Clement Junior High School, Mission School, and simultaneously at Crafton and Montone elementary schools.

He was an active member of Redlands Kiwanis, helping plan for the civic club's 75th Jubilee Celebration in 1963. He was credited with creating and running Redlands Relays for ninth-graders back when ninth-graders weren't able to participate in sports.

"Ernie's death saddens me. It is a personal and professional loss," said retiring Redlands Unified School District Superintendent Bob Hodges. "We served as principals together. I knew him when he was a teacher and I was a student at Lugonia.

"He made significant contributions to RUSD during his tenure," Hodges said. "He devoted many hours to youth programs in our community."

Owen was born Sept. 9, 1926 in Costa Mesa. He graduated from Newport Harbor High

School. He went on to earn his bachelor's degree in education, graduating Phi Beta Kappa from Pasadena City College, where he served as his senior class president. He retired from Redlands Unified School District in 1988 as director of elementary curriculum.

He was a Sunday school superintendent and church choir director and trombonist at Church of the Nazarene, which will host his memorial service Wednesday.

On July 17, 2006, Owen was featured in the Daily Facts' "Special People Around Our Town" column. At the time, Owen was noted by his family as one who used to scheme up good old-fashioned games of flashlight tag and giant games of kickball for his children and grandchildren. He used to conduct scavenger hunts and engineered elaborate cardboard tunnels throughout the house, and was known for leading campfire songs and entertaining with never-ending stories.

Owen is survived by his wife of 59 years, Freda; their son Matthew Owen and daughter Judy Owen Elder; son-in-law Todd Elder and daughter-in-law Marianne Owen.

He also leaves behind seven grandchildren: Courtney, Toph and Claire Grenfell and Tyler Elder; and Quinn, Cole and Cassidy Owen.

A memorial service commemorating Owen's life will be held 11 a.m. Wednesday, Nov. 28 at Church of the Nazarene, 1307 E. Citrus Ave.

Memorial donations may be contributed to Loma Linda University Medical Center.

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