

Frank Sissons, conservationist, friend and legend

'He was the last John Wayne of Conservation,' said Wildlands Conservancy's Executive Director

By RACHAEL M. GUSTUSON
Editor

There are some people who leave an indelible mark on the world when they pass away.

Yucaipa resident Francis O. Sissons, otherwise known as Frank, passed away on Sept. 30, 2017, leaving an important legacy of caring conservation for generations to come.

Sissons was born on March 6, 1929, to Francis and Ethyl Sissons in Los Angeles.

He was a proud veteran, serving in the Army during the Korean War. He was awarded several distinguished medals, but was very humble about the medals and his service. His career was with TRW Defense Sector as a supervising electrical engineer, but his love was for his wife Barbara, and his children; Patty, Janice, Ken and Bob.

The Sissons moved to Yucaipa in 1961 and Frank Sissons began leaving his mark all over town.

"Frank was the last John Wayne of conservation," said David Myers, Executive Director of the Wildlands Conservancy. "A lean weather-beaten horseman with a kind smile and the resolve of a general when he directed his passion toward saving many of the Yucaipa Valley's trails and cherished landscapes. I admired and now miss his true grit demeanor and his willingness to always jump into the ring if the cause was worthy."

Sissons devoted many years as a board member for the Yucaipa Valley Riding Club and the Yucaipa Planning Commission. He founded the Yucaipa Valley Conservancy, where he served as president until recently. It was during his time at the Conservancy, that he was primarily responsible for the formation of Wildwood Canyon State Park, in addition to other green-space parks in and around Yucaipa.

Sissons was a man of service and highly respected in the community, said good friend and current president of Yucaipa Valley Conservancy David Miller.

"On the short list of Yucaipa visionaries Francis O. Sissons belongs near the top," Miller said. "Just like the great oaks that grow in our Wildwood Canyon area, a community needs open spaces to breathe. Frank spent much of the last forty years protecting 'our' parks and open spaces, and the trails that link them together, to enable all Yucaipans to meander within and breathe."

"Along with serving on numerous commissions and committees in the city and county, Frank co-founded three non-profits to help our community preserve and protect our open spaces, parks, and trails. In 1979, the Southern California Horse Camp Improvement Association was formed and he helped lead the construction of the improved restrooms at Heart Bar Equestrian Camp Ground (along Highway 38, high in the San Bernardino mountains). In 1999, he co-founded Yucaipa Valley Conservancy and served as chairman until 2008, remaining on the board until 2014. In 2003, through YVC efforts, we had our very own State Park in Wildwood Canyon. In 2014, working with Wildlands Conservancy, YVC donated the land that is now our El Dorado Open Space Park. That same year YVC donated over 70 acres of blue stream oak habitat to the city in the Wildwood Canyon area."

Miller said Sissons mentored him in everything from running a community-based conservancy to earning blisters clearing trails.

"He was a tireless citizen that set a high bar for others and me. Citizenship is not easy. It takes a strong will and selfless vision, Frank embodied

both. Yucaipa (and myself) are the benefactors of Frank Sissons," Miller said.

Myers dedicated a monument to Dick Riddell and Sissons at the Jan. 30, 2014 El Dorado Ranch ribbon cutting for their involvement in the project.

Councilman and former Mayor of Yucaipa, Riddell worked with Sissons for a couple decades on various open space acquisitions.

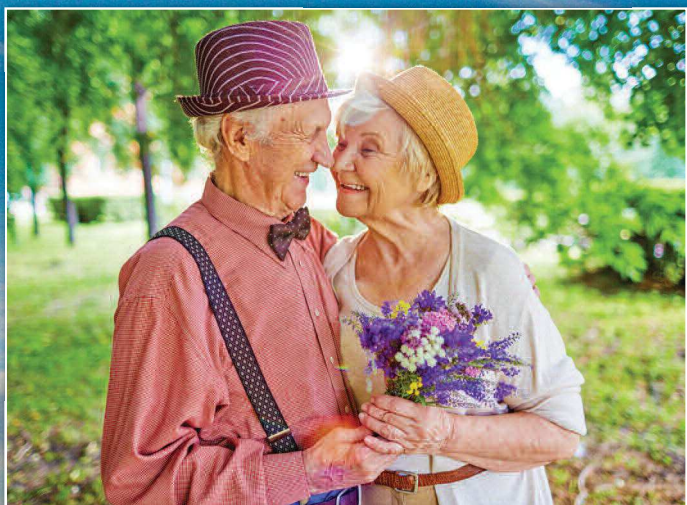
"He was a very good friend of mine," said Riddell. "He was a partner in acquiring open space throughout the city. His contributions to the city, parks and open space are unsurpassed. His passion was also making trails and he was quite an equestrian. I really enjoyed working with him."

Former Yucaipa City Councilwoman Diane Smith concurred. "Frank Sissons was a community-minded man who wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty," she said. "He was a hard worker and dedicated servant who was able to get things done. He was committed to protecting the natural beauty of our area and was a vigilant soldier against the influx of mindless exploitation of our natural resources."

Denise Work, Planning Commission, said she was saddened to hear of the passing of Frank. "It was over 20 years ago when I first met Frank," she said. "I was serving on the Trails and Open Space Committee with his wife Bobbie and we later served together on the Planning Commission. I knew I could always look to Frank for his expertise and experience in many facets of development, open space and just about anything 'Yucaipa.' Our city is a much better place because he was here. I would like for his family to know how much he was (and is) appreciated. I will miss him."

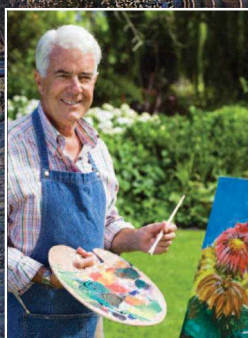


Frank Sissons, left with David Myers and Dick Riddell at the 2014 dedication of El Dorado Park.



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