

Community to honor Lucchesi at Friday services

Contributed by Elizabeth Larson
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THIS STORY HAS BEEN UPDATED.

CLEARLAKE – Hundreds of people are expected to gather today to bid a fond farewell to Mario Lucchesi, a longtime Clearlake resident who was known for his generosity, willingness to volunteer and his skills as a cook.

Lucchesi, 89, died peacefully at his Clearlake home on May 7 following a life that was filled with accomplishments and activities that touched many in his community.

Former Clearlake Mayor Bob Malley called Lucchesi “a pillar of the community.”

“His involvement in every aspect of the community was always prevalent and his smile and physical involvement will sorely be missed,” said Malley.

The Clearlake Masonic Lodge, which Lucchesi joined in 1972, will host a Masonic ritual memorial beginning at 10 a.m. Friday, followed by interment at the Lower Lake Cemetery where he'll be laid to rest beside wife, Daisy, and daughter, Nickola.

Lucchesi's son, Delmar Fellers, said a wake will be held at the Masonic Lodge after the burial. Fellers said several hundred people are expected to gather for the celebration of life.

Born in San Francisco on Sept. 9, 1918, Lucchesi would grow up in the Bay Area, according to Fellers.

Lucchesi entered the Army after high school and served in the Philippines during World War II. Reaching the rank of 1st Sergeant, Lucchesi received a bronze star.

After Lucchesi was honorably discharged from the Army just after Christmas of 1945, he returned to San Francisco, where he worked as a butcher in the Marina District with his brother, Bruno.

It was in 1952 that Lucchesi came to Clearlake Highlands, a place he first visited on family vacations during his childhood. He purchased several acres along the lakeshore, including a restaurant that went by the name of “Two Bit Tony's Italian Dinners” – which Fellers said was renamed “The Lodge.”

Eventually renamed “Mario's Lounge,” the establishment also hosted visits from celebrities such as singer Tennessee Ernie Ford and actor Slim Pickens, Fellers said.

About the same time as Lucchesi arrived in Clearlake, Dick Lewis came to the community. Lewis, now retired and the former owner of Jones and Lewis Mortuary, said that, when it came to describing Lucchesi – who was more like a brother than a friend – “I don't know where to begin.”

“He was one of the nicest people you would ever want to meet – a good friend, and a credit to his city and to the county,” said Lewis.

Lucchesi married wife, Daisy, in 1955, with Lewis' parents standing up for the couple at their wedding in Reno. Together, the Lucchesis operated the restaurant and bar – where he was known as “The Boss” – for 52 years.

In the early years, to support their growing family, he worked as a butcher during the day and at the restaurant at night. Later he was able to focus on the restaurant, where he worked seven days a week.

“Mario always wanted to succeed and he was good at what he did,” said Lewis. “He pleased people, he wanted to do right by people.”

That led to Lucchesi creating what was considered the best dinner house in Lake County, which attracted visitors from as far away as San Francisco, said Lewis.

Lucchesi was understandably proud of his business, and worked to put out the best meals possible. Lewis said he became famed for his Thursday night special of osso buco – an Italian dish made with braised veal shank.

He also was very proud of his Italian heritage, said Lewis.

Fellers said his father had passion for the community – as well as food. He combined the two to help causes all over the county, but he especially enjoyed cooking for the Redbud Parade's annual barbecue.

“He did fundraisers, he did everything,” said Fellers.

One of Lucchesi's lasting marks on the community is in the form of Redbud Park and Thompson Harbor, located on the property he originally purchased along Lakeshore.

Fellers said the county approached his father about the property and its lengthy lake frontage for the purpose of building a park. Lucchesi and his partners agreed to trade the land for another parcel that now is the site of the Travelodge motel, which Fellers built.

Even with all the hard work, Lucchesi still found time to travel with friends like Lewis, and devoted himself to the community, staying active over the decades in numerous clubs and organizations. They included: Lakeshore Lions Club, 53 years; Masonic Lodge, 36 years; 32nd degree Shriner of the Scottish Rite; 25-year active member of the Lakeshore Volunteer Fire Department, where he reached the rank of assistant chief and served on the board of directors; Veterans of Foreign Wars; Sons of Italy; Clear Lake Chamber of Commerce; was a charter and founding member of the Clearlake Elks Lodge No. 2299; board member of the Highlands Water Co. in 1977 and president in 2004.

The Lakeshore Lions Club named Lucchesi "Citizen of the Year" for 1993-94, and he served twice as the Redbud Parade's Grand Marshall.

The Lucchesis retired in 2004. Daisy died in 2005 after 49 years of marriage.

Daisy's death hit her husband hard, said Lewis. Since she died, Lucchesi was at the cemetery every day for an hour or so. “He never missed a day, rain or shine.”

In recent years, Lucchesi had found it difficult to keep up with his furious pace of activities, largely due to a series of surgeries and chemotherapy to battle lung cancer, Lewis said.

One of his brothers also had recently died, which Lewis said was tough on his friend.

“In the end, of course, he just wore out,” said Lewis.

The two men had spoken recently, not long before Lucchesi died. Lewis, also a Mason, was helping conduct his ceremony, which he said was a challenge due to the sadness he felt.

Lucchesi is survived by five children, Jocko Lucchesi and his wife Valerie, Delmar Fellers and his wife Jeanette, Clifford Fellers, Penny Banatyne and her husband Tommy, and Rodney D'Acquisto and his wife Gretta; nine grandchildren, Hollie and Anthony Lucchesi, Karen Winchell, Steve and Bill Fellers, Annie Roche, and Mark, Adam and Jamie D'Acquisto; two great-grandchildren; numerous nieces and nephews; and one brother, George Quilici, who recently celebrated his 102nd birthday.

The family has asked that memorials be made to the Lakeshore Lions Club in lieu of flowers.

Lewis recalled Lucchesi's enormous kindness, and said he felt deep love and respect for a man who he called “a great person, a great friend.”

“And I'm going to miss him,” said Lewis.

E-mail Elizabeth Larson at el Larson@lakeconews.com.

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