

(Article taken from the Union-Tribune newspaper)

By Tanya Sierra

UNION-TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

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Former Del Mar City Councilman Jerry Finnell, who was widely hailed for his financial acumen and who developed a 20-year plan to save the city money, died Tuesday. He was 68.

Mr. Finnell resigned from the City Council in April, after suffering a leukemia relapse.

Those closest to Mr. Finnell said he was a man of principle, humor and hard work. They said he was a man who cared deeply for his family and who was especially grateful for the bone marrow donor he never met.

“He had a 32-year-old donor,” his daughter, Jennifer Finnell, said. “He lived another good six months because of that.”

When Mr. Finnell found out he was ill, the imminent birth of his grandson kept him going, Jennifer Finnell said.

“He wanted to see Jason grow up,” she said. “He made it to his first birthday, and he got to see him walk. That was special.”

On the council, he was known for his financial expertise. Mr. Finnell was a retired certified public accountant. He and his family arrived in Del Mar after his 34-year career in accounting. That experience led him to volunteer on the city's finance committee, which looked at the reserve fund, an emergency savings account that public agencies are required to keep.

“There's just so many things that I loved about Jerry,” said Crystal Crawford, the city's deputy mayor. “He was everything that you could ask for. Jerry was the complete package.”

Mr. Finnell was elected to a second four-year term in November 2006. During his re-election campaign, his relapse limited his schedule. In one case, he participated in a candidate forum by speakerphone.

Councilman Richard Earnest, who was appointed to fill the remainder of Mr. Finnell's term, is a former councilman who worked on Mr. Finnell's re-election campaign. He said he admired Mr. Finnell's resolve.

Earnest said he asked Mr. Finnell if he was sure he wanted to go through with the campaign after news of the relapse.

“He made a commitment to people, and he wanted to fulfill it,” Earnest said.

Mr. Finnell also served as mayor one year, a position that rotates among council members.

His daughter said he enjoyed his public service role.

“Since he retired, he really found a lot of joy in being part of the Del Mar City Council,” she said. “I was always very proud of him. He was very kind, and he took care of everyone.”

The Finnells moved to Del Mar in 1996 after living 14 years in Chicago, where Mr. Finnell was in charge of the Midwest risk management division of the accounting firm KPMG.

He began his career with KPMG in Los Angeles after graduating from UCLA. For 25 years he was a senior partner. He was on the board of directors for seven years. He was also on the Illinois State Board of Accountancy for about 10 years.

He is survived by his wife Kathy of Del Mar, children Donald and Jennifer Finnell of San Diego, and one grandson.

A private service is being planned for this week. A community celebration of his life will be held in the future.

The family suggests donations to: In memory of Jerald Finnell for AML research at the UCSD Moores Cancer Center in La Jolla.

■ Tanya Sierra: (619) 498-6631; tanya.sierra@uniontrib.com