



Robert Hugo Zeller

November 4, 1924 - September 13, 2024

Robert (“Bob”) Hugo Zeller, a lifelong Napa resident, passed away peacefully on September 13, 2024, six weeks shy of his 100th birthday. He was a devoted husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather, and an active member of the Napa community.

Bob was the first-born child of Hugo and Virginia Zeller. He spent his youth with his siblings, friends, and cousins, playing in the vacant lot next door to his Third Street house and around downtown Napa, taking trips to Pine Grove (Lake County), and traveling to Oakland Oaks baseball games. He attended Shearer Grammar School, Napa Intermediate School and Napa High School. After graduating from high school in 1942, Bob enrolled in the University of California, Berkeley (Cal).

When he turned 18 in the fall of 1942, Bob enlisted in the Army. He joined the 87th Infantry Division in 1944 and after basic training, was deployed overseas to work in an intelligence role infiltrating enemy lines. Using his knowledge of the German language, he also interviewed German prisoners of war. In 1945, he was recognized as a Veteran of the Battle of the Bulge and awarded a Bronze Star for meritorious achievement in ground combat. He was honorably discharged in 1946. Despite suffering the loss of several of his platoon members during combat, and many other hardships endured in the war, Bob would later reflect that there was “no doubt that you would defend your

country.” Bob’s military service remained a touchstone throughout his life. He stayed connected with those he had served, trading photos and memories with their families and attending reunions with the 87th Infantry Division.

Upon his return from the war Bob re-entered UC Berkeley and earned his BA degree. While at Cal, he was a member of the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity, where he made lifelong friends. While working on his undergraduate degree, Bob enrolled in UC College of the Law, San Francisco (formerly Hastings College of the Law), where he earned his law degree in 1951.

Bob spent his summers during college and law school, working at the Pine Grove Store in Lake County. His parents had a cabin on the hill behind the store, as did the parents of a beautiful young woman named Inge Dix. The two began dating in 1949 and then married in November of 1951. They settled in Napa where they lived their entire marriage and raised their six children.

After passing the Bar Exam in 1952, Bob opened a general civil law practice in downtown Napa. He had various partners in his practice throughout the 70 years of its existence, which included Joe Keebler and Jim Terry, his son-in-law and his daughter, Cathy Zeller Erickson. As Joe and Jim were transitioning to another local firm, Paul Hoff, joined the practice and it became Zeller, Hoff & Zeller, Inc. Bob was active in the practice until 2021 at age 96. His clients trusted and respected him for his diligence, expertise, genuine concern and common sense.

Bob loved going on adventures with his family. In fact, he never took a trip and rarely did a physical activity, unless it involved his wife or his children. He, along with Inge and their children, took up skiing when he was 40 years old. He loved spending time in the outdoors, hiking in the Sierra Nevada mountains with his children and grandchildren into his 90s, playing tennis into his 80’s, and enjoying many family vacations at the ocean in southern

California and Hawaii. Bob and Inge were very dedicated travelers, visiting 70 different countries together. He also maintained a great interest in Cal football, attending every home game well into his 90's.

Bob loved Napa and was very proud to be a 3rd generation Napan. He was active in the community throughout his life. His family owned commercial property downtown and he worked hard to help create an environment where local businesses could succeed.

One of Bob's most significant community contributions came in 1966 with his service to Siena High School, run by the Dominican Sisters and Justin High School, run by the Christian Brothers. He was instrumental in the effort to bring them together to form what is now Justin-Siena High School. He was the President of the Board of Trustees for the school for 18 years. To help sustain the efforts to support the fledgling schools he sought support from the Gasser Foundation and additionally created the Justin-Siena Foundation to gain community support, which together have provided funds for the expansions and improvements of the school, along with funding scholarships for the student body. Bob was a founding director of Napa Valley Bank (now Westamerica Bank). He also donated his time and legal expertise to Community Projects, Inc. on Franklin Street for over 60 years and provided pro bono legal services to many other worthy local causes.

Bob was deeply committed to his family and to his community. He was hardworking, humble, and trusted by his family, friends, and clients. His quiet strength and steady presence will be missed.

Bob is preceded in death by his wife of 65 years, Inge Dix Zeller, his daughter, Debra Zeller Terry (Jim), and sister, Mary Zeller and his parents, Hugo and Virginia Zeller. He is survived by his brother, Jack Zeller, three daughters,

Cathy Zeller Erickson (Jeff), Janice McFarlane (Dan) and Lisa Miller (Ron), two sons, Robert (Debbie) and Kevin (Lauren), 15 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren.

The family wishes to express special appreciation to caregivers Helen Pormento, Rianna Caballes and Arleen Mojica who were with him in the last few years of our dad's life and to Rosa Felix, who has been instrumental in caring for our father, mother and their home for 30 years. These women were really like part of our family, and we are so grateful to them.

All are invited to the Celebration of Life service for Bob, which will be held on Thursday November 7 at 11:00 am at Tulocay Cemetery and Funeral Home, followed by a luncheon reception.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be sent to Community Projects, Inc., the Justin-Siena Foundation or a charity of your choice.

Cemetery Details

Tulocay Cemetery

411 Coombsville Rd
Napa, CA 94558

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

NOV 7. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (PT)

Tulocay Cemetery
411 Coombsville Rd
Napa, CA 94558

Reception

NOV 7. 12:00 PM - 1:00 PM (PT)

Tulocay Cemetery
411 Coombsville Rd
Napa, CA 94558

Tribute Wall

MB

“ It was an honor meeting your dad, Cathy, shortly before he passed away.
Heartfelt regards to the family. Thank you for the story of his life, accomplishments, interests and inspirations written up and shared in the Napa Register.
May you have a sense of peace, gratitude and respect for the quality and goodness his contributions historically represent that will remain here in the Napa Valley for years to come.
Sincerely, Myrna L. Baldwin, Napa, CA

Myrna L. Baldwin - November 05, 2024 at 12:09 AM

TL

“ It was with great sadness that we read about the passing of Bob Zeller. He was a shining example and representative of the Greatest Generation. The Napa Valley was lucky to have Bob as a community member and leader. Our condolences and prayers go out to Bob's entire family.
Sincerely,
Molly & Tom LeMasters

Tom LeMasters - October 17, 2024 at 12:28 AM

CM

“ I was so sorry to read of your father's passing. My Mom's house shared a back fence with the Gibbs's, so she shared many stories about your family through the years. It's sad to see another one of Napa's remarkable residents leave us. My sincere condolences on the loss of your dear father.

Carolyn Merry - October 15, 2024 at 12:26 PM

JH

I too was so saddened to read of Mr. Zeller's passing. I worked in Mr Zeller's firm for 8 years, and considered him brilliant legal mind. He was so honest, humble, kind and generous. So sad - another exemplary leader of our community gone. My condolences to his family.

Julie Hogan - October 17, 2024 at 11:14 AM