

County Dedicates Plaza and Unveils Legacy Art Project in Memory of Jim McEntee

SANTA CLARA COUNTY, CALIF. – The County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors, U.S., and local elected officials, and hundreds of interfaith and community leaders gathered today in front of the County Government Center to dedicate the James P. McEntee, Sr. Plaza and unveil the Jim McEntee Legacy Art Project.

Jim McEntee passed away in 2004, one year after retiring from the position of Director of Human Relations for the County of Santa Clara, where he worked for 27 years. McEntee was loved and admired by many for his unwavering commitment to respect for all people, social justice, and peace.

“Jim will always be remembered with profound affection and gratitude for his dedication to the people of this county,” said Supervisor Ken Yeager, President of the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors. “This memorial serves as reminder of his legacy and motivation to continue his work.”

“It is an honor to celebrate Jim’s inspiring legacy,” said Supervisor Dave Cortese. “Jim was a gentle and relentless advocate for those who faced neglect, discrimination, poverty and injustice. We all learned valuable lessons from Jim.”

Today’s dedication included nine interfaith blessings and music reflective of McEntee’s inclusiveness and love for building community.

“I feel honored to have known and worked with Jim McEntee on so many issues that were dear to him,” said Supervisor Liz Kniss. “He was a County ambassador when it came to linking people with programs and services, either as recipients or as advocates and volunteers.”

“Today’s celebration is another example of Jim’s gift for building bridges between communities that may have thought that they had nothing in common,” said Supervisor Don Gage.

“Jim showed us that tolerance is not enough,” said Supervisor George Shirakawa. “That accepting and embracing others is essential to our humanity.”

The Jim McEntee Legacy Art Project unveiled today showcases the “Gathering Place for Peace”, designed by San Jose artist Carlos Pérez. This gathering place is surrounded by eight benches with inspirational quotes imprinted on them, and a “dove” tile design in the center to reflect McEntee’s simple style and lifelong solidarity with the poor.

Also showcased is the artist rendering of a window mural with images reflecting McEntee’s life and work. Installation of the mural, which was funded by Applied Materials, will be completed in the weeks ahead. Photos include McEntee’s early life, family, his life as a Catholic priest, and his life with his multicultural family, leaders who inspired him and his work as Director of the Office of Human Relations.

“Jim had the capacity to make everyone feel valued,” said U.S. Congressman Mike Honda, who spoke at today’s dedication. “Jim’s life reflected that regardless our color, race, sexual preference, or socioeconomics, we deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.”

“I am very excited we are dedicating the “Gathering Place for Peace” to remember what Jim stood for and worked for in Santa Clara County,” said Ann McEntee, McEntee’s widow and Chair of the Jim McEntee Legacy Committee, a group of volunteers working to commemorate McEntee’s life’s work. “We are grateful for the support from the Board of Supervisors and County staff, as well as the diverse individuals and community groups who contributed and made this project possible. We hope this project serves as a daily reminder to continue Jim’s Legacy of peace and justice.”

About Jim McEntee

James P. McEntee, Sr., held leadership positions in the County of Santa Clara Office of Human Relations, from 1976 to his retirement in 2003, and was a model of human kindness and compassion. McEntee died on September, 2004, leaving a legacy of advocacy for social justice.

McEntee was a founding member of the Confederation de la Raza Unida, founding chairperson of the Second Harvest Food Bank of Santa Clara County, a founding member of the Emergency Housing Consortium, and the Help House the Homeless Coalition.

In the late 1980s McEntee urged the county to open up its armories to temporarily house the homeless during winter, a program that has continued throughout the years. Jim, fluent in Spanish, also worked

very closely with the United Farm Workers of America beginning in 1965. From 1962 to 1965, Jim served as the Executive Director of the Latin American Mission Program in San Francisco. Jim also served as Executive Director of Voluntary Action Center of Santa Clara County from 1973 to 1976.

During his tenure with the County, he served as the Director of the Human Relations Commission. He later served as manager of the Office of Human Relations until his retirement in 2003. He was responsible for the Human Relations Commission; Citizenship & Immigration program; Dispute Resolution Program Services; Network for a Hate-Free Community; Institute for Non-Violence program, and the Youth Advisory Task Force. Jim retired in July 2003 after 27 years of service.

McEntee held a B.A., Degree in Philosophy from Saint Patrick's College Menlo Park and a Degree in Theology and a Master of Divinity Degree from Saint Patrick's Seminary. Prior to entering the world of secular public service, Jim McEntee also served as a Roman Catholic Priest. He was associate pastor at Saint Catherine's Church in Morgan Hill and at Saint Louis Bertrand Church in Oakland.

In 1990, Santa Clara County Bar Association awarded Jim its Distinguished Achievement Citation – for non-lawyers who have made a significant contribution to the legal community and/or administration of justice in Santa Clara County.

McEntee was involved in church, civic and community activities. He was married to Ann McEntee, a true partner for social justice and a teacher, and with her reared a large multi-cultural family.

Background

Efforts to honor Jim McEntee's legacy started right after his passing. In May, 2005, the County of Santa Clara Board of Supervisors named the plaza in front of the main government center at West Hedding Street as the James P. McEntee, Sr. Civic Center Plaza. In February, 2008, the Board contributed \$15,000 to the project.

Spearheaded by the Jim McEntee Legacy Committee, the Jim McEntee Legacy Art Project was supported by the County of Santa Clara and hundreds of individuals, private and non-profit organizations inspired by McEntee's love for the community. Because McEntee was embraced by so many in Santa Clara County, the committee held more than 20 focus groups to gather community input to ensure the project reflected his spirit and values. The Committee also established a college scholarship fund for low-income students.

For more information, or to support the Jim McEntee Legacy Committee, visit:
www.JimMcEnteeLegacy.org.

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