

Earth Log: Mendota water advocate, leader Ed Petry, 86, dies

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Mendota civic leader Edward Petry died Friday in Fresno after decades of representing his area's water interests with state, federal and county agencies. Mr. Petry, a native of Boston, was 86.

State and federal agencies had long sought his advice and comment on projects along the San Joaquin Valley's west side. Reporters routinely called him for his plain-spoken thoughts about statewide water news and developments.

In 1994, I quoted him in a story about the way California's water was managed in the San Joaquin River and other places in California where stepped-up environmental protections were taking hold. He said wildlife was getting too much attention.

"People are getting hurt. Somebody needs to say something. So I do."

At the center of Mendota, a plaque announces "Ed Petry Civic Center" for the city hall complex. Mr. Petry had served as a city council member, city planning commissioner and water/flood adviser to the city.

City Council Member Joseph Riofrio of Mendota said Mr. Petry was known for keeping track of potential flooding events, warning local authorities when Mendota and Firebaugh were threatened. During cloud bursts and thunderstorms, area creeks are known to suddenly fill with water and flood small communities.

Mr. Petry's devotion to Mendota was known throughout the area, Riofrio said. He also was well-known to the California Department of Water Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

"He's irreplaceable," Riofrio said.

Mr. Petry came to Fresno County's west side after working as a lumberjack in the Pacific Northwest and Canada. He served in the U.S. Navy at the end of World War II.

He was a machinist for a local sugar-processing plant. Eventually, Mr. Petry became a general building contractor. He also leased and operated a sand pit.

Mr. Petry is survived by Lupe, his wife of 47 years.

Visitation is planned from 11 a.m. to noon Thursday at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Mendota. Rosary will be at noon, followed by the service at 12:30 p.m. Interment will be at St. Peter's Cemetery in Fresno.

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