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Obituary

Arthur Agnew

If something was a priority for businessman Arthur William Agnew, he was in it for the long haul.

The longtime president of Petaluma's Sunset Line & Twine Co. remained active in the family-owned manufacturing company into his 90s. He and wife Evelyn Agnew of Santa Rosa were on the verge of celebrating 66 years of marriage. And as a Rotarian in Petaluma, he maintained a perfect attendance record in club activities for over half a century, his family said.

"He's a devoted person," said daughter Carol Ann Smith of Antelope. "And he was dedicated to the things he loved."

The 93-year-old Santa Rosa man, a former president of the Petaluma Chamber of Commerce and the American Fishing Tackle Manufacturers Association, died Sunday of heart failure in a Santa Rosa hospital.

Agnew was born July 15, 1912, in San Francisco to Robert and Hope Agnew, the third of their four boys. Growing up in Alameda, he played baseball and basketball at Alameda High and attended the University of San Francisco on a baseball scholarship.

The homerun-slugging first baseman received contract offers from the Cincinnati Reds and other teams in the Pacific Coast and Texas leagues, but with a degree in accounting he opted instead for the financial security of the business world.

Professional baseball in the mid-1930s "wasn't like today, where you sign up for \$6 million," said Evelyn Erickson Agnew, who met her husband in 1937.

A year earlier, Agnew had become assistant bookkeeper with Sunset Line & Twine, a San Francisco fishing line maker started during the Depression when striped bass were abundant in San Francisco Bay and cash was tight.

What began as a two-man operation outgrew its San Francisco manufacturing facilities and moved in 1940 to the historic Carlson-Currier silk mill building in Petaluma. In 1950, Sunset's executive offices moved there, too, leading Agnew and his family to Santa Rosa.

Throughout the years, Sunset Line & Twine expanded its products to include cordage for a variety of applications, from high-tech to the airline industry. When World War II broke out, Sunset started making parachute cord for the government and became a key supplier for the military.

NASA also used Sunset's parachute cord for its Gemini and Apollo space missions, sending Petaluma products to the moon. Sons

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Art Jr. and John Agnew followed their dad into the business, which was sold in 2003. Sunset is now a subsidiary of Kansas-based Kraft Tool Co.

"We've always felt ... we should do everything we can to make dealings with customers fair and beneficial to all parties," John Agnew of Santa Rosa recalled. "That's what we learned from our father."

Agnew was beloved, too, as a joke-teller who was never ashamed to toss out a bad pun.

"He had a great sense of humor, and always a twinkle in his eye," Smith said of her dad.

The elder Agnew presided over the Petaluma Rotary Club in 1966-67 and served as district governor in 1977-78. He visited 15 countries on Rotary visits including Sweden, England, New Zealand, Canada, and several countries in South America.

"We've been to almost every continent but Australia," Agnew's wife said. "So I feel very fortunate."

Agnew and his family joined the Episcopal Church of the Incarnation in 1950 and he was Sunday school superintendent during the 1950s and served on the vestry for many years.

In addition to his wife, daughter and son John, he is survived by son Arthur W. Agnew Jr. of Redding, two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. He also leaves a brother, E. Russell Agnew of Salinas.

Funeral services and interment will be at 11 a.m. Friday at the Church of the Incarnation in Santa Rosa. The family suggests contributions to the Rotary Club of Petaluma Foundation, P.O. Box 5655, Petaluma 94553 or Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa Foundation, 3325 Chanate Road, Santa Rosa 95404.

- Katy Hillenmeyer