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Gallegos built with the good stuff

Huge crowd gathers to remember beloved Vail Valley philanthropist, businessman

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VAIL, COLORADO,

VAIL, Colorado — More than a thousand of Gerald Gallegos' closest friends got together Saturday to swap stories.

Mostly stories about him and what he gave to the community, which would have made him uncomfortable because he didn't really want people to know about that sort of stuff.

"Gerald didn't like people talking about him, but we did it anyway," said long-time friend Richard DeClark.

They hung around long after the memorial service ended to reminisce.

The good stuff lasts.

And what about the time ...

He loved people, and they loved him right back. Gerald's life is what it looks like when you get it right.

It looks like this: There was the 8-year-old who could not speak but could understand English and Spanish. Gerald fixed him up with the technology he needed to do well in school. The kid tells a killer knock-knock joke.

And this: There was the miserably hot day he bought ice cream for two soccer teams after a game. The ice-cream truck just magically appeared, and Gerald yelled something like, "Hey! The ice cream truck is here," like he was surprised to see it. You've never seen exhausted kids spring back to life so quickly.

And what about the time he dressed like an Easter bunny to deliver baskets to kids in a trailer park. There are pictures somewhere.

He listened intently as a young girl delivered a school report in two languages, haltingly in English and then more confidently in Spanish. He paid attention, asked insightful

questions based on what she'd read, and then told her she's a good thinker. She beamed. She never forgot it.

The good stuff lasts.

Built on his family's foundation

Gerald Gallegos helped found The Youth Foundation in 1997. He helped get Roundup River Ranch rolling. The camp for kids with cancer will open next summer.

Do not send flowers; they fade. Spend your time and money on good stuff that lasts. He asked that you send

donations to The Youth Foundation and Roundup River Ranch.

He was proud to be married to the beautiful and talented Suzanne and beamed when he talked about his daughters, Caroline and Hillary. Dads and daughters are special.

So are mothers and sons.

Mother Rosa instilled in the Gallegos clan the work ethic and values that propelled them all to success in business and life. Rosa also was the only person who could tell Gerald what to do. He might not always do what she told him, but he listened anyway.

He and his siblings grew up proud. The Gallegos family's roots in Colorado and northern New Mexico run 350 years deep, making them one of the nation's oldest families.

The good stuff lasts.

'Gerald was a capitalist'

During his Battle Mountain High School years in the mid-1960s, Gerald was one of Colorado's top heavyweight wrestlers, an exceptional pitcher and played college football at Mesa State. He loved to win and hated to lose but did both with dignity and grace.

They grew up hardscrabble in Minturn. You had to make your own breaks.

Gerald was in his early teens when Vail opened for business in 1962. He was young and strong and had never been tired. He worked in construction, worked in retail, worked pumping gas ... he worked.

He met everyone, did everything. It gave him a leg up as he was building his business, but that only takes you so far. The rest requires business acumen and hard work.

"Gerald was a capitalist," said Glen Gallegos, one of his three brothers who spoke at Saturday's memorial. "He liked the feel of money in his pocket, and he shared that feeling with as many kids as he could so they'd know it, too."

When they were kids, Gerald had all the snow-shoveling and grass-cutting jobs in Minturn.

"Gerald was in charge of getting the jobs; I was in charge of doing the jobs," Glen said.

He yanked Glen out the Eagle River once, pulling him out about 100 yards downstream from where he fell in.

"Sometimes when we'd argue as kids, you could almost hear him thinking that he should never have pulled me out of that river," Glen said.

Four boys, lots of boy-type activity resulting in some broken furniture.

"Mom said 'Your next paycheck, you're buying a new coffee table or couch or replace whatever we'd broken,'" Glen said. "We spent lots of paychecks on replacement furniture. She also told us that when we grew up and had our own houses, she was going to come over and break our furniture."

One winter, they were throwing snowballs and Gerald nailed brother Robert in the head with a frozen potato, dropping him like the sack of potatoes from whence it came.

"I see Gerald's life as a comet that you only see once in your lifetime. He will always be remembered," said brother John.

The good stuff lasts.

We're in the people business

Gerald started a business where none existed before. Because he did, thousands of people carved out careers, families and homes where none existed before.

When Sam Johnson, who runs Gallegos' Aspen office, asked current and former Gallegos workers to stand, more than half the Gerald R. Ford Amphitheater crowd got to its feet.

He was proud of his business, proud of the people who worked there and the work they did, Johnson said.

Walk around Beaver Creek or Vail with him, or almost any Gallegos employee, and they'll point to several projects that they're proud of. You would be, too.

"He loved training local people," Bob said. "He understood that if people had jobs and could provide for their families, they had stability and made good employees. We learned quickly that we were not in the masonry business; we were in the people business."

He had high expectations, and most of the time, people would measure up. If they didn't, he didn't raise his voice. He lowered it, knowing you'd have to lean in and pay attention, Johnson said.

He'd occasionally slip hod carriers and laborers a \$100 bill. He knew what they were going through because he'd been through it not so many years before.

The business started here in the valley and expanded to Colorado Springs, Aspen, Breckenridge, Telluride, California and about any other high-profile market you could name.

The Gallegos Corp. worked with presidents, princes, movie stars and heads of Fortune 500 companies. But he was at least as proud of Chatfield Corners, a locals community he helped develop in Gypsum where "salt of the Earth" people could afford to buy a home, said brother Robert.

The good stuff lasts.

A business built for goodness' sake

Joel Fritz was the last person to give Gerald a paycheck, said his brother John. While he was starting Gallegos Masonry, he also worked as a bouncer and doorman in clubs around Vail.

Some of those clubs were also his masonry clients. He often brought the crew by for what became known as an "extended lunch," which sometimes turned into a siesta and then into a fiesta - which gave the fledgling company its nickname, Manana Masonry.

He soon got serious about the business and it didn't take long for him to see that a successful business can improve lives in so many ways. Eventually, he found them all.

Along the way, he handled all the problems growing businesses face, along with occasional racial discrimination, said his brother Robert.

Forty years the Gallegos Corporation has been doing this. The family has been at it for 350 years. They'll keep doing it for as long as the rock lasts upon which their family and business is built.

Which is to say, they'll be around forever.

The good stuff lasts.

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