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Farewell, 'Mr. Clermont'

His life story mirrored the city's history

ROXANNE BROWN
Staff Writer

CLERMONT

Oakley Seaver had Clermont in his blood from the day he was born.

Seaver was born in 1916, the same year Clermont was incorporated. But his family was already enmeshed in the city.

Seaver's family roots in Clermont date back to the early 1870s, his family always active in the community. In fact, his great-grandfather helped found the community in 1884 and built the community's first house.

That house, a log cabin, later became the city's first school and is now the site used to house the women's club.

Seaver's father owned and worked in Clermont's first barber shop and his mother was a teacher in town. Seaver's grandmother was a charter member of First United Methodist Church, where Seaver attended his whole life and ushered for 47 years.

Seaver continued his family tradition, and the city's affairs were an important part of his life until the day he died.

"Clermont was his town, but he didn't mind sharing," said Dennis Horton, local attorney and a friend of Seaver for more than 30 years. "His ancestors founded Clermont and he had no intentions of ever leaving."

While working as a clerk at Clermont's post office, Seaver was called to serve his country in World War II.

According to friends and family, the postmaster at the time, Florence Bowman, was prepared to ask for his deferment, but Seaver did not allow it.

Seaver was stationed in Japan. Seaver left an imprint while there, helping establish a post office in Japan.

Seaver returned to Clermont in 1946 and was appointed postmaster. Seaver held that position for 32 years, all the while remaining involved in other aspects of the community.

Seaver was a charter member of the local Chamber of Commerce, and served as March of Dimes president and director of the historical society.

Until the day he died, he was also on the board for

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Oakley Seaver dies at 89

Staff Report

CLERMONT

Community leader Oakley Seaver died Saturday after a lifetime of dedication to Clermont.

Seaver, 89, was a long-time Clermont Kiwanis member, and spent the morning of June 14 delivering certificates of appreciation to donors. After a weekly lunch with friends, he planned to resume the deliveries, but never got the chance.

After lunch, he left to take a sandwich to the secretary of another friend, attorney Dennis Horton. At Horton's office, he slipped and hit his head on the steps. He was taken to Orlando Regional Medical Center and died three days later.

Jane Williamson, Seaver's daughter, said her father was born, raised and lived in a six-block area of downtown Clermont.

"Civic work was basically his life. He just loved it," Williamson said.

Until the day he died, he was on the board for South Lake Hospital, which he was involved in building. He was a charter member of South Lake Chamber of Commerce, served as March of Dimes president and director of the historical society and was Postmaster for 32 years — along with a host of other duties and titles. Last year, Oakley Seaver Drive was dedicated in his honor.

"He was just Mr. Clermont," said Mayor Harold Turville. "He was active at one time or another in every civic organization that you could be involved with around here. If it wasn't the hospital board, it was a social organization or a service organization."

In an e-mail, Goodgame said that Seaver was in

See SEAVER, A2



Community gathers to pay respects

"I heard someone say that the measure of a man is what's in his heart, and based on that, Oakley was a giant of a man."

That sentiment expressed by Dennis Horton, Oakley Seaver's friend of more than 30 years, was echoed by everyone who spoke at Seaver's funeral Wednesday morning at Clermont's First United Methodist Church.

Hundreds of family members, friends, city and county officials gathered to honor the life of "Mr. Clermont," a man who was well known and well respected.

And although goodbyes are never easy, the stories told by Seaver's closest friends and family members — especially those regarding Seaver's sense of humor — served to bring smiles to the faces of many in attendance, despite their tears.

"As a family, a church and a community, we must remember to celebrate the life of Oakley Seaver," said United Methodist's Rev. Doug Kokx, who was also a close friend of Seaver's. "His impact is all over our community. To be honest, it's all over our lives, and we're better off for it."

After a short prayer, Kokx was the first to give a personal account of Seaver.

Kokx told attendees about the day he walked through the doors of the church after moving to Clermont more than seven years ago.

He said that Seaver greeted him much like he greeted any newcomer over the years, offering friendship and the eagerness to share his knowledge of Clermont.

"He was so fond of Clermont and wanted everyone new to love it like he did," Horton said.

Kokx told of how his own daughter, then in eighth grade, was assigned a report on Clermont. Kokx said they visited the library before remembering "the guy that met us when we first stepped through the doors."

Kokx remembered his name was Oakley, so they approached him.

"Little did we know how much he'd been around Clermont," Kokx said. "For two hours, he told us of the joy he felt about having lived in Clermont all his life."

As two more of his closest friends got up to share their

See FUNERAL, A2



Top: Fred Saunders, left, and Dennis Horton, right, lead the pallbearers during the funeral for Oakley Seaver at First United Methodist Church in Clermont on Wednesday. The 89-year old lifelong resident of Clermont was honored by hundreds at his funeral service.

Above: Jane Williamson, center, daughter of the late Oakley Seaver, looks on as a flag is folded during the interment of Oakley Seaver at Oak Hill Cemetery in Clermont.

Story by Roxanne Brown ♦ Photos by David Manning

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OBITUARIES

Jean D. Fearing

Jean D. Fearing, 82, of Newberry passed away Saturday, June 17, 2006. Mr. Fearing was born in Jewell County, Kansas and moved to Newberry from Clermont four years ago. He was a retired machinist for Grove Equipment Service, he also worked as a welldriller, a watchmaker, and a draftsman. He was of the Methodist faith. Survivors include: his wife of 61 years, Arlene Fearing of Newberry; a son, Randy Fearing of Gainesville; brothers, Glenn Fearing of Texas and Harold Fearing of Enterprise, AL; sisters, Beth Alexander and Lauradelle Warne, both of Camdenton, MO; five grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He was preceded in death by a sister, June Dempsey. Arrangements entrusted to Williams Thomas Funeral Home, 404 North Main Street,

Gainesville, FL 36201. Funeral Services will be held in Burr Oak Cemetery in Burr Oak, Kansas.

Betty Sue Sorenson

Betty Sue Sorenson, 68, of Groveland passed away on Tuesday, June 13, 2006. Born in Alabama, Mrs. Sorenson was a waitress in the food service industry. She resided in Central Florida for 54 years. She is survived by: a daughter, Janice (Jack) Strickland of Groveland; two sons, Tracy (Solange) Wilbanks of Winter Haven, and Charles (Becky) Floyd of Center Hill; a sister, Eunice Lamons of Chattanooga, TN; eight grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren. There was a visitation on Wednesday, June 14, 2006 from 6-8:00 PM at Purcell Funeral Home. Services were held Wednesday, June 14, 2006 at 3:00 PM at Tuscanooga Baptist Church. Interment was held at Tuscanooga Cemetery, Groveland. Arrangements were entrusted to Purcell Funeral Home, Bushnell.

Robert Oakley Seaver

Oakley Seaver, "Mr. Clermont", 89, passed away Saturday, June 17, 2006. Mr. Seaver was born on October 29, 1916 to Robert Percy and Winnie (nee H o o k s) Seaver. He was a pioneer descendant of Clermont, his family was one of the original settlers of Lake County in 1868, and his family built the first home in Clermont in 1874. Oakley served in the United States Army during World War II, and then, after returning to Clermont, became the Postmaster, retiring after 32 years. After his retirement from the Postal Service, he was involved in real estate for 20 years. Mr. Seaver was a member of the Clermont Kiwanis Club, where he served as a past President, past Lt. Governor, received the Club's first Hickson Award and had 59 years of perfect attendance. Mr. Seaver was also the

Founder of the Clermont Kiwanis Foundation. Mr. Seaver served on the South Lake Hospital Board for 50 years, was a charter member of the South Lake Chamber of Commerce, served as a past President, was a past chairman for the March of Dimes, where he served for over 40 years; he was also Founder and Past President of the Jaycees, which established Jaycee Beach in Clermont, Past President of the Florida Postmasters Association, and received the Postmaster of the Year Award in 1971 for the State of Florida, and was a Founder of the Friends of the Library. Mr. Seaver was also a member of the Masons, Shriners, American Legion, V.F.W. and was a Kentucky Colonel. Mr. Seaver was honored as the Grand Marshall for Clermont's Centennial Celebration. Mr. Seaver was a member of the First United Methodist Church in Clermont, serving the church in numerous positions through-

out the years. Mr. Seaver is survived by: daughter, Jane Elizabeth (Bill) Williamson of Taylors, SC; brother, Leonard Seaver of Groveland; sisters, Nell Seaver of Clermont, Dorothy Lassiter of Gainesville, and Betty Magruder of Lakeland; grandchildren, Elizabeth Ann Cummings, Dale Cummings Tack, Karen Cummings Rogers, Dr. Nancy Hal Cummings, Charles Robert Seaver, Jr., Melissa Seaver, David Brent Williamson and Leigh Ann Williamson; and 7 great grandchildren. He is predeceased by his wife, Sarah Jane; a son, Charles Robert Seaver; a daughter, Martha Ann Cummings; a brother, Judd Seaver; and a granddaughter, Sarah Lynn Cummings. The family requests, in lieu of flowers, memorials be made to the Clermont Kiwanis Foundation. A guest book is available at www.beckerfamilyfuneral.com Becker Family Funeral Home, Clermont, Florida is serving the family.

DEATH NOTICES:

George N. Boyd

George Norman Boyd, 77, of Clermont died on Sunday, June 11, 2006. Becker Family Funeral Home, Clermont.

Doris G.I Brachvogel

Doris Gail Brachvogel, 71, of Minneola died on Thursday, June 15, 2006. Becker Family Funeral Home, Clermont.

Robert S. Decker

Robert Stewart Decker, 89, of Montverde died on Monday, June 12, 2006. Becker Family Funeral Home, Clermont.

Thomas C. Walker Sr.

Thomas Clarkson Walker Sr., 86, of Groveland died on Wednesday, June 14, 2006. Becker Funeral Home.

Peggy E. Watkins

Peggy E. Watkins, 81, of Clermont died on Tuesday, June 13, 2006. Brewer & Sons Funeral Home.

HISTORY

Continued from A1

South Lake Hospital, which he helped build in the late 1940s.

His most notable involvement may have been with Clermont Kiwanis. A member for 59 years, Seaver had a perfect attendance record at the club. He also served as the group's president and acting governor.

According to family, Seaver was a member of Clermont's first ever football team, playing wide end and, always claimed he was three months older than Clermont.

Seaver's younger brother, Leonard Seaver, said Clermont was chartered in October 1916, but that because of a large freeze the community lost its charter and had to be re-chartered three months later.

Since Seaver's birthdate was October 29, 1916, Leonard said Seaver always claimed he was technically older than the city.

Longtime friend Bill Clay

said that Seaver loved everything he was involved in.

"We know of his many accomplishments, the accolades he had and the honors he's been bestowed, but they don't tell the story," said Clay. "The story of his deep affection for all of life."

Because of his love and dedication to Clermont, the city honored Seaver last year with his own road that runs alongside South Lake Hospital. Friends, family members, city and county officials gathered in March 2005 at the dedication of Oakley Seaver Blvd.

"Clermont lost 'Mr. Clermont,' the church lost their oldest active member, Kiwanis lost their greatest salesman, the hospital lost their greatest supporter, the family lost a father, brother, grandfather, great-grandfather and many lost their friend," wrote Leonard Seaver in a letter read at Seaver's funeral.



A tourist buys an "opening day cover" from Postmaster Oakley Seaver and Clerk Dorothy Kindred the day a branch post office opened in the Citrus Tower in 1958.

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FUNERAL

Continued from A1

stories about Seaver, the family sat close to one another, holding hands and laughing as they listened to them reminisce.

Family friend Bill Clay said that Seaver had heard him speak at another funeral they both attended years ago. Clay said he was not sure if Seaver approved or was amused by his speech, but then Seaver asked him to speak at his own when it came time.

"He reminded me many

"Everything they said about him is absolutely true."

— Kiwanian Richard Neese

times, asking 'Are you ready?' " said Clay. "I always said I was ready, but here I am today, and I'm not ready."

Horton told everyone how for the past 15 years, he met Seaver at noon for lunch at Spiro's every Wednesday. Horton said they would talk at length about everything, sometimes on their own and sometimes with other friends.

Horton said he felt Seaver was like a second father to him.

He said that although they had their differences, he cherished every bit of time he spent with Seaver.

"I got to know Oakley. I got to know a great man," Horton said.

Kokx then read a letter written by Leonard Seaver, Oak-

ley's brother.

In the letter, account after account affirmed the love Seaver had for his entire family, the First United Methodist Church where he ushered for 47 years, the Kiwanis club he was a member of for more than 60 years, South Lake Hospital where he served on the board since it was built and of course, Clermont, his home of 89 years.

In the letter, Leonard said that because of Oakley's kindness, generosity, energy, sense of humor and love of people, his whole life was overshadowed by Oakley's life — always having to hear, "Oh him? That's Oakley's brother."

"As a young man, I had no identity. I bore the label of Oakley's brother," Kokx read on

Leonard's behalf. "But in all honesty, I wore the label as a badge of honor."

The accounts about Seaver all came down to the same things. Oakley Seaver loved life, his community, his family, his church and his town. The town he was born in. The town where he lived all his life. The town he was proud of. The town he knew everything about.

Leonard even joked about how Oakley's idea of a fun time wasn't golf or fishing, but rather, riding around town with anyone who would drive him, taking in the changes that occurred over the years and attending any civic and city related meetings.

"Everything they said about him is absolutely true," said fellow Kiwanian Richard Neese. "He was a fine, fine man and he taught me a lot. It really won't ever be the same again for us at Kiwanis."

Seaver's interment at Oak Hill Cemetery followed the church service Wednesday afternoon.

SEAVER

Continued from A2

good spirits Wednesday at lunch, talking about his vision for the city and recommending a parcel of land for annexation.

"He wanted to see Clermont grow to the Orange County line," Goodgame wrote. "Maybe it will one day."

Both Turville and City Council member Elaine Renick said council meetings will be hard without Seaver in the crowd.

"I'm so used to looking out during a council meeting and seeing him sitting there," Renick said. "I just can't imagine what the next meeting will feel like ... He was the heart of the community."

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