

Marian Estates owner remembered

Maurice Reece, a fixture at the retirement center, dies at age 72

By Denise Ruttan, *The Stayton Mail*, June 13, 2012

When Cindi Franck, now co-CEO of Marian Estates, first came to the facility to work in 1981 as a certified medical aide, she met a good-natured man wearing Levi's and a Hawaiian shirt in a hallway of the retirement community in Sublimity. He smiled at her as he mopped the floor.

"He said his name was Maurice Reece and he worked here," Franck said. "I only found out two days later that he was the owner. He never asked his staff to do anything he wouldn't do."

Maurice Reece died on June 1 of a heart condition. He was 72 years old.

Reece bought Marian Estates in 1975 from the Sisters of Servite, an order of Austrian nuns. In 1954 they had started a 54-bed nursing home called Mother of Grace Home for the Aged, later known as the Marian Home.

Now the facility sprawls across a 38-acre campus in the heart of Sublimity, offering independent living in cottages and garden homes, as well as assisted living, physical rehabilitation and nursing care. The organization employs 240 part-time and full-time workers and operates 24 hours per day, seven days per week. About 300 residents live on campus.

"Not only is he leaving a legacy, but a strong sense of family and friends in his company," Marian Estates Marketing Director Brenda Moore said.

It was the organization that Reece poured his soul into after careers in construction, property management and teaching, Marian Estates and Maurice Reece, with their intertwined destinies, are difficult for many to imagine apart.

Reece's stepfather had been a resident there in the last years of his life.

In those days, Reece would wake up at 2 or 3 a.m. every day to take care of his collection of more than 200 exotic parrots at his home in Lake Oswego, most of which he donated to the San Diego Zoo years later. Then he would make the commute to Sublimity to visit his stepfather, said his wife, Jan Buffa Reece.

"Reece visited him every day. When the Sisters of Servite couldn't continue to own the property, they asked him to buy it," Jan said.

Reece had no prior experience in the medical field, but that was only a challenge to overcome. He earned the necessary certifications and learned all he could about the industry.

"He loved people and he had lots of energy and experience in construction. (Marian Estates) became his passion," Jan said. "At the point when he could afford to retire, he sold a lot of his properties. He had worked since he was 7 or 8 years old and didn't know how to not work. We worked hard and played hard for 18 years together and it's been wonderful."

He did not own any other commercial properties prior to his passing.

Born in 1939 in Wetaskiwin, Canada, Reece moved to Idaho when he was about 12, his wife Jan said. After that he was brought up in an orphanage. A new family adopted him and raised him as their own.

In young adulthood, he moved to New York to earn his bachelor's degree in liberal arts education.

"In New York he worked full-time in construction and raised poodles. He graduated in three years," Jan said.

Years later, he liked to tell people that he put himself through college by breeding and selling poodles. An animal lover, he also raised sheep and Brahman bulls at various times in his life.

He sold the big brownstone house that he had owned in New York, then used the money to buy more properties in Hawaii, where he moved next. There, he earned a master's degree in urban planning and geology.

He moved to Lake Oswego and taught for nearly a decade at Lake Oswego and Lakeridge high schools. Every summer he took his students to Europe.

Reece's final move was to Salem, to be closer to his work.

For 18 years, Reece was married to Jan, who works as the CEO of the WVP Health Authority. They met through a mutual friend, the late Judge Val Sloper, and they kept running into each other at medical conferences.

"We would have been married 19 years as of July 11. It's my birthday and anniversary. He chose my birthday as the day we got married so he wouldn't forget the date," Jan said.

The couple shared a passion for world travel. They journeyed extensively to Asia, South America, Europe and Australia,

An avid collector, Reece's wide-ranging collection of Asian and European antiques got so massive that Marian Estates visitors can glimpse the porcelain he brought back from China or snuff bottles from France decorating the buildings on campus in Sublimity.

Over the years, Marian Estates became an extension of Maurice Reece's family.

"His generosity went far and wide. You could often see him handing a worker \$10 to get gas for their car, or \$20 to buy diapers for their baby," co-CEO Cindi Franck said.

He knew every resident and staffer by name. A popular saying about Reece goes, "No one's a stranger to Maurice Reece."

"He often stopped and chatted with residents, and asked about their kids and their lives. I'd never seen that in an owner before," Marian Estates co-CEO Henry Fox said.

Sherlyn Unruh, a resident billing coordinator who has worked for Marian Estates for 32 years, recalled Reece as a "bubbly, jolly man."

During holidays the staff and residents would get together for a meal and good cheer. At Thanksgiving he would carve the turkey. On Halloween he would dress up in costume.

"He'd go down the halls singing at Christmastime. I remember that," Unruh said.

One time, a young man worked in the dietary department who had been transferred there from the maintenance department, Franck said. One day he went to work in a pair of sandals. The human resources director said he needed to change into shoes. But the young man said he did not own a single pair of shoes.

"As he was on his way out to his car to go home, Maurice stopped him and asked him where he was going. He explained what was going on," Franck said. "Maurice took the loafers off his own feet, handed them to him and said, 'See if these work for you and go back to work.'"

Robin Franck, Cindi Franck's husband, works in the landscaping department. Often Reece would work alongside him, happily trimming hedges.

"I worked with Maurice but I never felt like I worked for him," Robin Franck said. "He never demanded that you did anything. He would ask. It wasn't like going to work. It was like going to do what you wanted to do."

His employees remember him as a personality that was bigger than life.

"You don't meet people like him in your lifetime," Cindi Franck said.

No public memorial service will be held. A private gathering for family and Marian Estates staffers and residents was organized.

Reece had a transition plan in place for Marian Estates leadership. Two co-CEOs and an experienced, hand-picked administrative staff will carry on operations.

He leaves behind his wife, Jan Buffa Reece; a stepson, Scott Byrd; a 5-year-old grandson, Hudson; two well-loved English bulldogs; and countless extended family members and friends.

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