

Bob Parlette, a major force in creating Loop Trail, dies at 76

by Mike Irwin, Nevonne McDaniels

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World photo/Mike Bonnicksen

Bob Parlette talks to the crowd during a tour of the proposed Rocky Reach Trail extension on March 30, 2013.



WENATCHEE — Bob Parlette, whose passion for the outdoors and public access to the Columbia River changed the Wenatchee Valley, died Tuesday at his home. He was 76.

He was instrumental in securing legal access and funding for the Apple Capital Recreation Loop Trail that stretches along both sides of the Columbia River; the Rocky Reach Trail; and, more recently, the Peshastin Mill Trail. As a founding member of the Complete the Loop Coalition, he worked for years

to promote recreation and preserve public access across the Wenatchee Valley.

A work party in his honor last weekend saw volunteers building a riverfront trail on the old Peshastin Mill property, just west of Peshastin.

“When I came to town, I wanted to go down to the river. I was at Fifth Street, and there was a big fence there, and a ‘Do Not Enter’ (sign). This was a dumping ground. I literally could not find a place to gain access to the riverfront and I just couldn’t believe that,” he said in a 2009 interview about his work to conserve the Wenatchee riverfront.

“It gladdens my heart every day I go down there and see people riding bikes and smiling at each other as they take a walk. We had our back turned to the river and now our front is turned towards the river and everybody has great hopes for what’s going to happen on the Wenatchee waterfront.”

Parlette, the husband of former state Sen. Linda Evans Parlette (they married in 1986), was an attorney by trade. He grew up in Toledo, Ohio, graduating from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1963. He was a combat pilot in Vietnam from 1965 to 1969.

He graduated from the University of Washington Law School in 1972 and moved to Wenatchee to accept a job in a law firm, eventually becoming a partner at the Davis Arneil Law Firm.

He was active in other areas of the community, stepping in as interim Wenatchee Valley College president from 2000 to 2001.

“Being married to Bob Parlette was quite an adventure,” Linda Evans Parlette said Wednesday afternoon.

He was diagnosed with an aggressive cancer, acute myeloid leukemia on July 19, with two to four months to live. He made it two months and one week, she noted.

“You know how they say, ‘When you’re married to a cobbler, you children have no shoes?’ Well, I married an attorney and we had not updated the will since we married 31 years ago,” she said. “We really got organized. That was probably good.”

Despite being public figures and active in the community, “We still had a life,” she said. They traveled extensively.

They were supposed to leave Wednesday for a trip to Colorado Springs for a pilot reunion, she said.

When Bob Parlette graduated from the U.S. Air Force Academy in 1963, his pilot training in Colorado Springs included pilots from Germany who came to train in the U.S.

Some 30 years later, he organized a reunion. The first was held in Sun Mountain in Okanogan County. Five years later, the Germans invited the U.S. pilots to a reunion there, in a castle. Over the years, she said, they started having reunions more often, traveling back and forth.

“We’ve really had a fun time together. Bob was very much a last-minute person. He never made reservations,” she said.

Bob Bugert, who led the Chelan-Douglas Land Trust for nine years before retiring last year, knew Parlette for more than 20 years. They met while working on trail projects.

“He has been a true mentor to me in community relations and having a vision and sticking to it,” he said. “My heart goes out to Linda and his family. For their loss, which is a great loss to our community.”

Bugert said he sought Bob Parlette's advice and counsel on how best to work with the community.

"Bob was the eternal optimist. He had a special kind of positive nature to him that was very contagious," Bugert said. "He never gave up on projects. He just had a remarkable ability to bring people along with him on his vision. That was for the benefit of the community. And he was tireless in his promotion of the things that benefited our community. He leaves a lasting mark on our community."

Doug Pauly worked with Parlette for 20 years on the Rocky Reach Trail project and was a co-chair of the Complete the Loop Coalition.

"If he thought he was doing right, he was not afraid to go after it," Pauly said. "He made all the difference in the Loop Trail and Rocky Reach Trail effort and the third effort, the Peshastin Mill Trail. In all three cases, they were a vision for building a stronger community. Without his leadership, none of those projects would have happened."

Pauly noted that Parlette's connection to the trail system go back to the construction of the Odabashian bridge in the 1970s.

The bridge's original design didn't include a pedestrian bridge, so Parlette, who was a young attorney at the time, took the issue to U.S. Sen. Henry Jackson and Warren Magnuson. The bridge was redesigned to include a pedestrian trail, which later made the Loop Trail possible.

"He is an example of how one person can make a big difference in our community in terms of leadership, vision and determination. He embodied all three," Pauly said.

Lacey Price, of Peshastin, a volunteer coordinator with Parlette on the successful Save the Peshastin Mill Waterfront project, said he was "the kind of visionary person we don't meet everyday."

Gene Sharratt, former superintendent of the North Central Educational Service District and a longtime friend of Parlette, worked with him on many projects, including Make A Difference Day, the Douglas Creek Trail Project, the Highway 97A Safety Project and a local POW Vietnam Veterans Reunion.

"Bob's leadership impacted many lives," Sharratt wrote in an email. "He leaves a colorful tapestry of influence, of weaving experiences into a meaningful life, not focused on self, but directed in the service of others."

Parlette's contribution is "one of extraordinary vision, perseverance in the face of obstacles and an authentic commitment to family and community," Sharratt said. "To live in the service of others — to lift others up — is the greatest contribution we can make. That is Bob Parlette's legacy."

A celebration of life is being planned at a later date.

Bob Parlette is survived by his wife, Linda; five children: Brooke Parlette Lucy, Peter Parlette, Andrew Parlette, Guy Evans and Lucas Evans; and three granddaughters: Larkin Lucy, Mariah Lucy and Jessie Evans.

Linda Evans Parlette said she isn't sure how her husband will be remembered.

"Probably for not letting bureaucracy get in his way. He was focused on projects, often telling people how to do them," she said.

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