

Chris Miller, the co-creator of Pleasanton Military Families and the Yellow Banner Project who touched so many other local causes in addition to his years as a military and civilian pilot, a real estate professional and a devoted family man, died on Dec. 29 in Folsom where he had moved to a memory care facility a couple of months before while battling dementia. He was 86.

Chris was among the most active and dedicated Pleasanton residents; I'd seen him countless times at public events throughout the years not to mention his regular drop-ins to the Weekly offices as he picked up the new edition, offered a story idea or just wanted to say hi.

"Pleasanton had such an impact on my dad, and he had such an impact on Pleasanton," his youngest son Michael Miller told me during a family interview on Tuesday.

"Everybody knew who my dad was; he knew everyone. He was a talker. He loved to talk that's one of the things I miss the most, just talking with my dad," Michael added.

Chris Miller III was born and raised in the small town of New Canaan, Conn. "Chris loved having his birthday on July 4th. Very apropos since he was so patriotic," Marty Miller, his wife of 56 years, told me.

After earning his bachelor's degree from the University of Pennsylvania while also participating in the ROTC program, Chris entered the U.S. Army Reserve and soon discovered a love of flying. He would go on to serve 27 years in the military, between regular and reserve service, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1987.

Chris spent more than a decade as a commercial pilot with the old SFO Helicopter Airlines in the 1960s and '70s before transitioning into real estate in 1977.

"100% effort 100% of the time" was his motto as a Realtor, Marty recalled.

They had moved to Pleasanton in 1971, several years after meeting in San Francisco, and put down roots here. "When he came to Pleasanton, he just felt he just knew this is where he wanted to start a family, to open a business and to be involved. He really loved being involved and giving back," Michael said.

He became very active in the Rotary Club of Pleasanton, including a term as president in 1986-87. Michael recalled dad was so committed that he would find Rotary Clubs on family vacations so he could attend as a visiting member and never miss a weekly meeting.

But Chris' community involvement took an even more personal turn in the early 1990s amid U.S. military operations in the Middle East. Motivated by the disrespect he witnessed himself and other returning service members received during the Vietnam War era, Miller co-founded a support group in Pleasanton for local troops and their families during deployments to Desert Shield/Desert Storm.

"He and Alice Johnston really saw an opportunity so that doesn't happen again," Marty recalled. Their original group disbanded after those conflicts ended, but not after organizing a huge parade in Hacienda for returning troops.

And more than a decade later, Chris would help reintroduce a support network at the outset of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan that soon became the Pleasanton Military Families organization we know today for its pack-out and welcome-home efforts. He also committed to the Yellow Banner Project on Main Street.

As humble as Chris was giving back to Pleasanton over five decades-plus, community leaders certainly noticed. His list of accolades stands second to none: Mayor's Award in 2020, Ed Kinney Community Patriot Award in 2020, Pleasanton Weekly's Man of the Year in 2009 and one of our inaugural Tri-Valley Heroes (2012: Community Spirit).