

EAST PALO ALTO

Roberts, Little League coach and ex-city official, dies

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Tommie Roberts, a longtime East Palo Alto resident, Little League coach and former planning commissioner considered by some to be the city's "unofficial mayor and ambassador," died last Thursday. He was 81.



ROBERTS

Roberts died at Kaiser Permanente hospital in San Francisco of heart problems related to a double-bypass surgery he underwent days earlier, his son, Byron Roberts, said.

"If you talk about Little League, there's only one person who qualifies to be called Mr. Little League in East Palo Alto,"

said Community Services Director Meda Okelo, who worked closely with Tommie Roberts for more than two decades on a variety of projects, including the renovation of Martin Luther King Jr. Park.

"He was the kind of person who touched so many people's lives over so many generations ... since he worked with children," Okelo said.

Tommie Roberts became involved with the Ravenswood Little League in the early 1970s and served as league president for about 20 years, Byron Roberts said. He was active in city politics, often attending council meetings and serving as a planning

commissioner.

Born March 26, 1928, in Meridian, Miss., Tommie B. Roberts moved to San Francisco with his siblings as a teenager to live with his father after his mother died. He worked for Greyhound as a porter while finishing high school and in 1950 joined the U.S. Army. He was stationed in Germany and rose to the rank of staff sergeant.

After his discharge in 1953, Roberts worked as a bus driver for the San Francisco Municipal Railway, or Muni. He met his wife Mamie that year on a double date and the couple married soon after. They celebrated their 56th wedding anniversary on Jan. 25.

In 1964, Roberts took a job with the California Department of Transportation, or Caltrans, and moved his family to East Palo Alto. He started in highway maintenance and worked on the construction of Interstate 280 as the only African-American on his crew.

When Roberts retired 27 years later as the Foster City maintenance region manager, he oversaw maintenance on every state roadway from Cupertino to South San Francisco and from Foster City to the Pacific Ocean, Byron Roberts said.

Tommie Roberts participated in three Masonic fraternities and volunteered for the American Cancer Society through those organizations, often driving patients to their medical appointments.

"My dad never saw the bad in anyone," said Roberts' daughter, Sonja Tracy. "He loved his com-

munity, and he loved his community service."

"He always had a warm, comforting smile," Byron Roberts added. "If you went to him with problems, he could look at you and you just felt comfortable talking to him."

Lajannette Williams, the administrator at St. John Missionary Baptist Church in East Palo Alto, said Tommie Roberts was an active member for more than a quarter century, singing in the male chorus and doing maintenance work for free.

"He was very cheerful, very happy and always had something nice to say," Williams said. "He used to bring the Little League fliers."

Roberts was at the church the week before his death doing his usual maintenance work, she added.

The family is holding a wake and viewing at St. John's, 1050 Bay Road in East Palo Alto, from 6 to 8 p.m. Sunday. A funeral service will be held at the church Monday at 11 a.m. followed immediately by a procession to Skylawn Memorial Park in San Mateo. Everyone is welcome, but family members are asking those who wish to speak to do so at the viewing rather than the funeral service because of time constraints.

Roberts is survived by his wife, Mamie, of East Palo Alto; his daughter, Sonja Tracy, of East Palo Alto; his son, Byron Roberts, of Milpitas; two granddaughters, Anjuli Roberts and Rosetta Mamie Roberts; two grandsons, Ahmed Shahin and Yosef Shahin; and one great-grandson, Atticus Tommie Roberts.