

## **Renowned San Bernardino Real Estate Developer, Civic Leader & Entrepreneur Warner Hodgdon Dies**

*Warner W. Hodgdon, the descendant of San Bernardino Valley pioneers and a historic figure in San Bernardino City development, passed away Wednesday, March 20.*

March 21, 2013 (FPRC) -- Warner W. Hodgdon, the descendant of San Bernardino Valley pioneers and a historic figure in San Bernardino City development, passed away Wednesday, March 20. He was 80.

Born in Colton on August 12, 1932, Hodgdon was proud to be the great-great grandson of Jefferson Hunt, a captain in the "Mormon Battalion," State Assemblyman and the founder of the original Mormon settlement in San Bernardino and is honored as the Father of San Bernardino County.

Hodgdon showed a range of talents at an early age - he was chosen "cutest baby" in a Sears Roebuck contest at the age of two. He was a self-taught piano player, and played varsity baseball during his time at San Bernardino High School.

Although he worked as a box boy at Burke's Market Spot alongside future Stater Bros. CEO Jack Brown, Hodgdon had a penchant for building that led him to become a plumber's apprentice and into building his own projects in his 20s. He completed one of his first projects during those years - a five-story building on Arrowhead Avenue across from the county courthouse.

He ultimately became one of the most prolific developers in Southern California, with significant projects in the City of Industry and through his ownership interest of J.D. Diffenbaugh and other companies. He was involved in the construction of hundreds of businesses and homes including the San Bernardino County Government Center and Shandin Hills Golf Club. He proclaimed that the Shandin Hills course was "Exclusively Public."

His love of San Bernardino and vision for its future ultimately brought him to leadership of the city's Redevelopment Agency two different times, where he helped develop city landmarks like City Hall, the Central City Mall and later the Ashley Furniture complex in Colton.

Although he is known for his building, finance and real estate development, Hodgdon had careers and interests far beyond the average businessman.

He was a cowboy at heart and ran 500 head of cattle on the historic Heart Bar Land and Cattle Company in the San Bernardino Mountains, where he had spent much of his free time during his growing years working with his grandfather.

He purchased and operated the Tri-City Airport in south San Bernardino, which later became the foundation for the Hospitality Lane restaurant and retail development.

He was one of the founding partners of a professional soccer team - "Team America," which played at RFK Stadium, owned car and tractor dealerships, and ranches in Arizona.

Hodgdon is probably best known nationally as a serious owner and sponsor of auto racing teams and tracks. He started his own team in 1976 with a car known fittingly as the "Spirit of Public Enterprise" in tribute to San Bernardino and sponsored local driver Billy Scott in the Indy 500 and went on to run at Indy for eight more years.

Ultimately, Hodgdon became part or full owner of nearly a dozen race tracks, from Ontario Motor Speedway in San Bernardino County to the tracks in Nashville and Bristol, Tennessee; Richmond, Virginia and Phoenix, Arizona. Three of these tracks still hold multiple NASCAR Sprint Cup series events. He was part owner of Johnson Hodgdon racing with Hall of Famer Junior Johnson and sponsored teams owned by the famed Woods Brothers and Bud Moore. He sponsored and owned NASCAR teams that included drivers Dale Earnhardt, Bobby Allison, Neil Bonnett, Richard Childress and Darrell Waltrip. His teams won NASCAR championships in 1980, 1982 and 1985 and dozens of races, including back to back World 600 victories in 1982 and 1983. For years he sponsored the local races and drivers at Ontario and Riverside fittingly titled the Warner Hodgdon 400 and the Sharon Hodgdon 200.

Throughout his life, Hodgdon believed strongly in giving back to the community that had fostered his business success. His philanthropic activities gave several million dollars to help sustain the Boys and Girls Club of San Bernardino, the Lighthouse for the Blind, Campus Crusade for Christ, Santa Claus Incorporated and many Boy Scout troops and other community organizations.

He was especially active in supporting Little League - sponsoring an entire league for many years - and he donated the funds to build swimming pools and other facilities at the Western Regional Little League Headquarters facility in North San Bernardino, including the YMCA and YWCA.

A lifelong patriot, his racing cars always proclaimed "God bless America." He was an extremely strong supporter of the Jerry Pettis Memorial Veteran's Hospital in Loma Linda, and received many awards from the Air Force Association, the Marine Corps and other military organizations.

Hodgdon always believed that the best community was one in which private industry and government worked together for the success of its citizens often declaring it was our responsibility to "pull the plow for America" and to "produce more than we absorb." He was always in the forefront of pushing his beloved San Bernardino forward, from heading the Redevelopment Agency to aiding local groups in bringing new development to the city's West Side like Operation Second Chance.

As with most pioneering business leaders, he faced challenges and detractors, but everyone who knew him will remember his hard work ethic, his brilliant mind, his concern for others and his enduring optimism for the next great venture.

Hodgdon is survived by his children - Christi Bulot, Jay Stanley, Darren Hodgdon, Marti Hodgdon, Aaron Hodgdon and Justin Hodgdon - and by 10 grandchildren.

### **Contact Information**

For more information contact Anne Monaghan of Monaghan Communications  
(<http://www.hodgdongroup.com>)  
(909) 783-3020

### **Keywords**

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