



SATURDAY, MARCH 11, 2006

ELI LURIA: 1919-2006

## Philanthropist was longtime civic leader

### Developer spent 27 years as a City College trustee

By **THOMAS SCHULTZ**  
NEWS-PRESS STAFF WRITER

Eli Luria, the Santa Barbara real estate developer whose hands-on philanthropy and volunteer work made him one of the region's most lauded civic leaders, died Friday morning at home after a long battle with prostate cancer. He was 86.

A longtime Santa Barbara City College trustee, Mr. Luria played a key role in the land

purchase that created the picturesque West Campus. He led a fund drive that raised \$1.2 million, including his own \$250,000 donation, to help build and in 1989 open the library there that bears his name.

As a developer, Mr. Luria is best known for office buildings, homes and apartments dotting the South Coast.

An artist who exhibited his brightly colored paintings as recently as this month, Mr. Luria in the early 1990s shared humorous anecdotes

about his family's globe-trotting in a pen-and-ink News-Press cartoon series he called "Travel Sketches."

Mr. Luria was a staunch backer of the mission of the United Nations, and he also heavily supported the Santa Barbara Museum of Art and several other organizations; his record of involvement dates to his arrival on the South Coast in the mid-1950s.

"He was a man of all seasons, I'll say that about him," Leatrice Luria, his wife of more than 59 years, said hours after his death Friday.

Please see **LURIA** on **A14**



Eli Luria in 1997.

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SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS

FROM THE FRONT

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NEWS-PRESS FILE PHOTOS

Eli Luria and his wife, Leatrice, are shown with one of their promised gifts, a painting titled "Putnam's Pond" by Milton Avery. An artist himself, Mr. Luria in the early 1990s shared tales about his family's globe-trotting adventures in a News-Press cartoon series he called "Travel Sketches," below.

## Developer nurtured his passion for art

### ■ LURIA

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"He had many interests.

"He was gracious to all kinds of people, all races, all colors," she said. "He was always cheerful, and he always had a ready smile.

"Of course, he hated what was happening to him," Ms. Luria said. "We made life very comfortable, and made it possible for him to be pain-free."

Diagnosed with prostate cancer 14 years ago, Mr. Luria spent many years with the illness under control before its spread took an increasingly heavy toll in recent months.

Follow developer and longtime friend Michael Towbes, who partnered with Mr. Luria in the 1950s and 1960s, in recent days called Mr. Luria a visionary and "probably the nicest, sweetest person I ever met."

"He's made great contributions," Mr. Towbes said. "He's been a visionary, been a tremendous asset to City College in terms of foreseeing what their long-term needs would be."

Former City College President Peter MacDougall agreed.

"We are losing a wonderful, wonderful human being," he said Friday, recalling Mr. Luria's 27 years as a City College trustee from 1976 to 2003, his longest civic affiliation that included two terms as board president. "I really feel Santa Barbara has lost one of its giants."

Mr. MacDougall recently asked his close friend if he had any regrets. "He had no regrets. The one thing that he said was how positively he felt about keeping up his painting and his interest in art."

Mr. Luria's last public appearance was Feb. 19 at the Bronfman Family Jewish Community Center, for the opening of "What Art Means to Me," his most recent exhibition. It came down last Sunday.

Friends and family celebrated Mr. Luria's 80th birthday in 1999 at the Ridley-Tree Center, which held a show of his at the time.

"At the party, Mr. Towbes reflected on a project the two shared years ago in Los Angeles. "Our first subdivision was just about our last. Eli wanted to name it Virginia Park because it was a pretty place and that is where he was from. The kids would remove the final 'i' and 'a' from the signs. We have a terrible time selling those houses. We couldn't find any qualified buyers."

Born Aug. 24, 1919, in Washington, D.C., Mr. Luria grew up there and attended Corcoran Art School and George Washington University before heading west in 1943 to attend UCLA. He graduated in 1945 with a bachelor's degree in art, history and psychology.

Afterward, he returned to Washington and for three years worked as a commercial and fine artist on the Evening Star newspaper.

But construction was too much a part of his family. His father was a builder, and so were his brothers. Mr. Luria and one of them began building homes and apartments, including

some of the first contemporary subdivisions in Arlington, Va., under the name Luria Brothers.

Itching for California, Mr. Luria returned with his wife in 1953 and lived in Los Angeles for two years before moving to Santa Barbara. It didn't take long for him to work his way into the region's civic fabric. Mr. Luria and another local builder, Paul Galtner, soon co-founded the Santa Barbara County Home Builders Association.

Luria Development Co. projects included the Hope Gardens office building and the Monterey Pines Apartments. Also, he and Mr. Towbes built the Cliff House apartments on Cliff Drive.

On Friday, Mrs. Luria described one of her husband's residential projects on La Colina Road as the first in the region to incorporate a park, a clubhouse and a community pool.

City College appeared on Mr. Luria's radar soon after his arrival in Santa Barbara, after Mrs. Luria enrolled in a pottery class. From then on, they contributed large sums to the school and encouraged others to do so.

The Lurias reveled in their relationships with students here and at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village, Nev., where they spent summers from in the mid-1970s to late 1980s.

Mr. Luria was instrumental in setting up scholarships and also the Foundation for Santa Barbara City College, which raised money for three major campus projects: the library, an interdisciplinary studies building and a student services center. He served as the foundation's first president.

The Eli Luria Library is on the 31-acre West Campus, acquired in 1976. Mr. Luria was co-chairman of the citizens committee that worked for three years to pass a \$3.8 million bond issue to buy the land.

He was behind the acquisition of the Alice F. Schott Center in 1981 at no taxpayer expense. Alerted by Selmer Wake, founder of Santa Barbara's Adult Education program in 1947, that the former Garfield School was being declared surplus, Mr. Luria helped arrange a swap involving Adult Education's Santa Barbara Street site.

He also helped arrange for private contributions toward renovations.

Later, Mr. Luria learned that the Goleta school board was vacating the unneeded Cathedral Oaks School on Turnpike Road. He persuaded City College board members to use surplus Adult Education money for a large down payment. The school in 1984 became the Selmer O. Wake Continuing Education Center.

"I enjoy creating projects that are stimulating to me and beneficial to others," he told the News Press in 1990.

On Friday, his wife said it is impossible to know how many millions of dollars Mr. Luria helped to raise for various causes.

City College officials plan to fly the school's flag at half-staff next week in honor of Mr. Luria.

In 1966, he underwent a rare open heart surgery to correct a congenital ailment. From early childhood, he was restricted from participating in strenuous exercise, but after the



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**Peter MacDougall**,  
former SBCC president

surgery played tennis or golf several times a week, hiked and swam.

Mr. Luria received many honors, including the News-Press Lifetime Achievement Award in 1990 and the Santa Barbara Man of the Year Award in 1996.

He supported the mission of the United Nations as a board member of the local United Nations Association, one of several organizations he helped to shape including the Citizens Planning Association and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation.

After Egypt sank an Israeli destroyer in 1967, he wrote a letter to the editor: "Let us look forward to the day and time when, in future generations, the U.N. is so strengthened that all will live peacefully under the protection of world law, and we can celebrate the end of the horrors of war."

Upon receiving a Distinguished Community Service Award in 1988 from the

Anti-Defamation League and Santa Barbara B'nai B'rith Lodge, Mr. Luria said, "We have to learn to live with different religions, different politics and different-colored people."

But Mr. Luria also showed his lighter side when he cautioned the audience that "In these times, even God would have a hard time creating the universe if he had to go through the Board of Supervisors."

Mr. Luria is survived by his wife; his daughter, Kandy Luria-Budgor, and her husband, Beno Budgor, of Potomac, Md.; and his two grandchildren, Mindy Budgor and Adam Budgor.

A private graveside service will be held, and an outdoor public memorial will be held at 1 p.m. April 9 at the City College West Campus.

In lieu of flowers, donations can be made to the Foundation for Santa Barbara City College, 721 Cliff Drive, Santa Barbara 93109.

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