



Perris Press Release

Contact: Joe Vargo, Perris Public Information Officer
Phone: 951-956-2120
jvargo@cityofperris.org

Perris Mourns Death of Former Mayor Virginia Wyatt Denney Fox

Former Perris Mayor Virginia Wyatt Denney Fox, a feisty and frugal businesswoman who donated her entire municipal salary to various charities while serving on the Perris City Council, has died.

Mrs. Fox was 86.

Mrs. Fox served on the Perris City Council from 1993-1997, at a time when the City faced severe budget shortages that required painful and difficult executive decisions, including disbanding the 85-year-old Perris Police Department and contracting with the Riverside County Sheriff's Department for law enforcement services.

Perris City Councilman Mark Yarbrough served with Mrs. Fox.

He recalled her as a tireless advocate for the City who was tenacious and passionate about making Perris the best possible community. If that meant working without a salary, Mrs. Fox was willing to donate her City Council stipend to charity.

"She put her money where her mouth was," Yarbrough said. "When she believed in something she followed her convictions all the way through. She was driven and committed to the City of Perris."

Mrs. Fox served as the City's appointed mayor in 1993 and 1997. She had previously worked for Avon cosmetics for 25 years and owned an antiques store in Hemet. In addition to her service on the Perris City Council, Mrs. Fox served as a trustee with the Val Verde Unified School District from 1997 to 2001 and as recently as 2010, she was a member of the Community Action Partnership of Riverside County. She was also a member of the Perris Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Soroptimists.

Perris City Councilwoman Rita Rogers served with Mrs. Fox on the Community Action Partnership. Rogers also remembered Mrs. Fox as being "very frugal and prudent" with public finances.

Mrs. Fox, who followed Perris and national politics after leaving public office, was an avid letter writer to area publications. In an August 2011 letter to the editor of the Riverside Press-Enterprise, Mrs. Fox explained the origins of her financial frugality.

"I was born in 1926 and was a little girl during the Great Depression," she wrote. We were fortunate enough to have vegetables and fruits to eat. My grandmother made cabbage in six different recipes. It was a penny a pound." She went on to write that people should live within their means and not expect the government to bail them out during tough times.


Mrs. Fox wasn't afraid to display her strong religious faith while serving the public. In 1996, she organized a Day of Prayer with local ministers to help the City find divine inspiration to ease its budget woes. She also organized a vanpool that drove around the outskirts of Perris seven times to drive out what she called "negative spirits" that were preventing the City from moving forward. She labeled the trek "Operation Jericho."

"When negative spirits leave, there could be clarity of thought and there could be people thinking in a positive vein," she said.

But she was savvy enough not to carry her beliefs too far—especially when they might cost Perris taxpayers money. When school trustees wanted to place the Ten Commandments at all campuses in defiance of a Supreme Court decision prohibiting public displays of religion and a promised lawsuit by the ACLU, Mrs. Fox drew the line.

To ignore the high court's ruling, she said in an interview with the Los Angeles Times, was "anarchy" and would set a terrible example to young people. It would also cost the district money to fight the promised lawsuit.

"I'm a devout Christian, and I respect the Ten Commandments," she told the Los Angeles Times. "But there are Hindus and Native Americans and others who don't subscribe to at least the first two commandments."

 <http://articles.latimes.com/images/pixel.gif>

When the City of Perris received a federal \$1 million grant to hire 10 additional police officers in 1994, Mrs. Fox went to the White House as part of a contingent of local officials invited by President Bill Clinton. She also presented Clinton with a key to the City.

The president wrote a note to Mrs. Fox, saying it was "kind of you to honor me" with the key to Perris.

"I hope you enjoyed your visit to Washington and I extend my best wishes to the citizens of Perris," Clinton wrote. Information about survivors or funeral arrangements was unavailable Thursday.



Virginia Wyatt Denney Fox