

Allen Arthur “Al” Alsing – It Was a Great Ride



Allen A. Alsing came to Ashland as assistant city engineer and water supervisor, intending it to be a temporary job. He retired 36½ years later as the city’s first director of Public Works, responsible for the departments of Engineering, Equipment Maintenance, Water, Sewer, Street and Airport.

He was born August 13, 1927, in Oakland, California, the second child of Henry E. and Jessie F. Alsing. His early years were spent there, including attending kindergarten at Mills College, a school for young women.

His parents divorced when he was very young; his mother reared the children, but his father remained close. He attended the first five grades in Oakland. He was a school crossing guard and a Cub Scout.

When his maternal grandfather died, the family moved to a farm near Nicasio in Marin County to help his grandmother. He took on the role of “man of the family,” including protecting their livestock from predators with his .22 rifle and 16-gauge shotgun. (At age 6, his father had given him a disabled rifle; at age 10, he gave him the missing bolt.)

In a partial handwritten biography, he characterized his boyhood as being carefree.

As a son of a single mother, Al tried never to cause her any problem, and hard work was the norm. While on the farm, they raised poultry on a small, but commercial scale. He was president of the Nicasio 4-H club. When the family moved to San Rafael during his junior year of high school, he carried newspapers, soon becoming the head of several carriers. He was 14 when WWII started. With most of the able-bodied men gone, young people had to step in. He had his driver’s license at age 14 and his truck-driver’s license at age 16. Still in the growing stage, he lifted bales of hay and heavy milk cartons, building unusual physical strength, but also starting a back problem that would bother him later in life. The work enabled him to buy a War Bond every week. In a partial handwritten biography, he characterized his boyhood as being carefree.

At San Rafael High School, he was named in the top 10 students, was a member of the Scholarship Society, and was chosen for Boys State of California. The students participated in scrap drives, and made silhouettes of military aircraft for identification. Even with all the coaches gone to war, and in tennis shoes, he set track records plus the gym rope ascent and descent and the bar vault. He received a scholarship, established by parents of a son killed in the war, but gave it up knowing he would have the G.I. Bill after military service.

Al wanted to be a Navy pilot, but a partial color-blindness ousted him every time he tried, so he joined the Army. The captain at the Camp Beale, California, Induction, Separation and Training Center kept all the high-IQ inductees to run the base. Al spent his 18 months in the Separation Center counseling the returning veterans on schooling, insurance, job opportunities and marriage. He was also an MP, and was offered OCS if he would re-enlist.

After graduating from Marin Junior College with an Associate in Arts Degree, Al and a friend chose to go to Oregon State University. When the studious fraternity he wished to join would not accept his Chinese friend, Al refused to be a member. He graduated in 1951 with a degree in Civil Engineering with a minor in Sanitary Engineering, and was hired by the City of Ashland.

In 1953, Al married Katherine M. "Kay" or "Kathy" Rice. On June 7, 2011, they would have been married 58 years. Their son, James, born in 1956, but damaged *in utero*, and very much loved, died in 1994, age 37. Al was incredibly kind to and supportive of his wife.

The two principles by which Al lived were "Not to hurt anyone else" and "You can get a lot done if you don't care who gets the credit."

His licenses from the State of Oregon also included land surveyor, water rights examiner, water distribution operator, and water and waste water treatment plant operator. He was also a notary public in Jackson County, and a licensed private pilot.

From 1951 until 1987, he worked for the City of Ashland, starting as assistant city engineer and water supervisor, then as director of Public Works, with the departments of Engineering, Equipment Maintenance, Water, Sewer, Street, and Airport under his jurisdiction. In 1985, the City of Ashland named a water reservoir the *Allen A. Alsing* reservoir. He was also responsible for working with the U.S. Forest Service on management of the 14,000-acre watershed serving the city of Ashland and owned by the Forest Service.

He was past secretary and staff advisor to the Ashland Airport Commission, Ashland Bikeway Committee, and Ashland Traffic Safety Commission, and was a past member of the Rogue River National Forest Citizen's Advisory Council.

His community involvement included: the Oregon Association of Retarded Citizens (past president, Rogue Valley Chapter); Oregon Shakespeare Festival Association (volunteer, 1966-2004, member of Board of Directors, 1985-1990, secretary 1990, chairman Facilities Committee 1985-1994; president of Red Coats (ushers), 1994); United Fund (past unit chairman); Oregon Institute of Technology (Engineering Technology Division Advisory Committee, 1987-1994, Committee Chairman, 1987-1988; Engineering Technology Foundation, Trustee, 1993-1997; Ashland Parks and Recreation Commission, 1991-1994,

(vice chairman, 1991, chairman, 1994-1995, finance officer 1996-1997); Ashland Parks Foundation (trustee, 1994-1997, chairman 1994-1997); Southern Oregon Historical Society Foundation (Board of Trustees 2004-2007); Oregon Aviation Museum (member Board of Trustees, 1989-1997, treasurer, 1990-1997; Ashland Airport Commission, 1988-1993, chairman 1990; and Ashland Airport Association; treasurer, 1992-1997.

His awards included: Professional Engineers of Oregon, Rogue Valley Chapter, Engineer of the Year, 1971; American Water Works Association, Fuller Award, 1976; American Water Works Association, Community Relations Award, 1978. He was elected by his peers to be one of the 52 AWWA Directors in the world; American Public Works Association Samuel A. Greeley Local Government Service Award, 1982, William A. Bowes Service award, 1984. He was selected as one of the Top Ten Public Works Leaders of 1985 in the USA and Canada.

He was named Ashland "Volunteer of the Year" in 2008 by the Ashland Chamber of Commerce, nominated by the Shakespeare Festival, where he volunteered for 43 years.

Al enjoyed reading, photography, computers, history, flying, travel, fishing, engineering and design, plus working with his hands in carpentry, minor plumbing and electrical work, and especially the company of good friends.

He was a quiet, intelligent, responsible, humorous person who lived his life positively. He enjoyed telling the many funny things that happened in the various areas of his life. His friends were many, with buddies from pre-school, army, college, volunteering and working who kept in touch.

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His working life was dedicated to the City of Ashland standardizing procedures and placements, improving anything possible. He particularly delighted in scrounging for free something the city needed or could use for improvements.

Al's youthful appearance caused many to think of him as "a kid," but they were soon disillusioned. One day he saw the crew arguing if there was enough cable on a reel. He measured the diameter, multiplied by π , then by the number of coils, and told them how much there was. The foreman, Eddie Fallon, said, "Well, boys, now you know why he is boss and we are not."

The two principles by which Al lived were "Not to hurt anyone else" and "You can get a lot done if you don't care who gets the credit."

Al Alsing died May 22, 2011, at the age of 83. A partial handwritten biography starts, "It has truly been a great ride."