

Sidney Singer / Inspiration behind Veterans Place of Washington Blvd.

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By Anya Sostek, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

On Washington Boulevard in Larimer there stands a \$2.5 million housing facility for veterans that almost everyone -- except Sidney Singer -- believes should have Mr. Singer's name on it.

For more than a decade, Mr. Singer worked tirelessly to build Veterans Place of Washington Boulevard -- fulfilling his vision of a place where homeless veterans could get back on their feet.

One of his daughters, Linda Singer of New York City, said he didn't build Veterans Place for his own recognition.

"He did it because he thought it needed to be done," she said.

Mr. Singer died Wednesday of pulmonary fibrosis at his home in Monroeville. He was 84.

The day he died, he insisted on taking a shot of Bailey's Irish Cream in the hospital and on eating a bowl of sherbert at home.

"The family was so, so happy that he went out how he wanted -- being independent," said his daughter. "He loves his freedom. He's a dreamer."

Born in Pittsburgh and raised on the North Side, Mr. Singer served in the Army Air Forces from 1942 to 1945 and worked for Alcoa as an aircraft maintenance coordinator.

He was a man of action.

Mr. Singer lost a thumbnail helping a broken-down motorist -- as he was on his way to the doctor for a problem with his hand.

As a member of the Monroeville Volunteer Fire Company No. 6 for more than 40 years, he would drop everything -- even during a Passover service, laughed his daughters -- to respond to the fire bell.

"He did anything for anybody," said another daughter, Susan Singer of Penn Hills, a paramedic who was joined by her father for her first ambulance call and joined him for his last call.

He came up with grand plans to help people in need, said his wife of 51 years, Barbara, and worked relentlessly to make them a reality.

He worked for more than 10 years to establish low-income housing for senior citizens, spearheading the 101-unit East Boros Seniors Citizens Apartment Building on Ivanhoe Drive in Monroeville.

He then turned his attention to the problem of veterans battling substance abuse, psychological problems and homelessness.

"He wouldn't take no for an answer," said longtime friend Stanley Rolnik, who is now president of the board at Veterans Place. "If someone turned him down, he would keep coming back, telling them, 'These men fought for you. The country owes them a debt.' "

Nancy Zions, chief program officer at the Jewish Healthcare Foundation, gave Mr. Singer a small grant for architectural planning early in the process and was stunned to read a Post-Gazette article later on that he had raised more than \$1 million for the project.

"He is one of those people that you will not forget," she said. "You will not forget his smile. You will not forget what determination is."

He won numerous awards for community service, including the Jefferson Memorial Award for Public Service, the Pennsylvania Meritorious Service Award from the governor and the U.S. House of Representatives Medal of Honor from Rep. Tim Murphy, R-Upper St. Clair.

Literally on his deathbed, Mr. Singer instructed his family on his vision for an expansion to Veterans Place -- a facility on an adjoining lot that would serve disabled veterans.

Floor by floor, he described what he wanted in the new facility, down to the granite countertops in the kitchen, Linda Singer said.

"We haven't gotten to start fundraising for it yet, but it's in our blueprints," Mr. Rolnik said. "We will fulfill Sidney's dream."

In addition to his wife and daughters Linda and Susan, he is survived by three other daughters, Carol Singer of Monroeville, Debra Pickholtz of Marlboro, Mass., and Nancy Axler of Yardley, Bucks County; a brother, Mervin Singer of Mayfield Village, Ohio; and three grandchildren.

The family will receive visitors from 10 to 11 a.m. Tuesday at the Ralph Schugar Funeral Home, 5509 Centre Ave., Shadyside, with a funeral service at 11 a.m.

Burial will be at the National Cemetery of the Alleghenies in Cecil at 1 p.m.

Mr. Singer requested that any donations in his memory be made to the Veterans Place of Washington Boulevard and asked that people give generously.

Read more: <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/10015/1028410-122.stm#ixzz0cgnwLNx>