

Fresno advocate Nick Bronzan dies at 90

He was best known for work with YMCA, on behalf of seniors.

By Jim Steinberg / The Fresno Bee

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Nick Bronzan, a longtime Fresno advocate for young people, seniors, Democrats and others, died Sunday in a Fresno hospital in what his son, former state Assembly Member Bruce Bronzan, called a loving family moment.

Mr. Bronzan was 90. He was best known in Fresno for his leadership of the YMCA and for work on behalf of seniors.

"You can almost always tell a retired person by the way he walks," Mr. Bronzan once said. "There's no purpose to it. It's kind of a slow, I-don't-care-if-I-ever-get-there-or-not kind of walk because it's just spending time. They're atrophying, and they don't like it."

Mr. Bronzan never walked like that, not when he was coach at Kerman Union High School, not when he directed the YMCA in Fresno or led the Foster Grandparents Association, friends and family members said. He was elected president of the Northern California Foster Grandparents Association in 1979, and served on 14 commissions and boards.

The son of Yugoslavian immigrants, Mr. Bronzan was born in Stockton and grew up in Manteca. He played tackle for Fresno State College teams coached by Jimmy Bradshaw.

Jim Molich lived with Mr. Bronzan and about 30 other players in what they called the Renegade House at Weldon and Maroa avenues. Molich played in later years than Mr. Bronzan but recalls him being "like a rock on the football field. We all played both ways. He was a leader. He organized a lot of activities, and he was the captain in 1939," a championship year.

"For those days, he was a good size, 225, something like that," Molich said.

Coach Bradshaw wrote a recommendation for Mr. Bronzan, describing him as more interested in the players than in winning.

Mr. Bronzan graduated from Fresno State in 1939. He worked five years as Kerman High School coach in various sports, and taught mathematics. Then he worked four years in the Fresno YMCA before moving to the Culver City area of Southern California to become executive secretary of that YMCA. He also worked for a time with the YMCA in Tulare County.

When he wasn't coaching and working for the YMCA, Mr. Bronzan worked in the farm equipment business with his brother, Andy.

In 1961, Mr. Bronzan became general secretary of the Fresno YMCA, taking over as executive director of the Central Valley YMCA in 1968. He belonged to Fresno Rotary and served on the 1965 Fresno County grand jury.

Sharon Levy served on the Fresno County Board of Supervisors with Mr. Bronzan's son, Bruce. She says of Mr. Bronzan, "He cared so much about people. Whenever he appeared before the board, you could see it. He talked one on one, and he always talked about people."

Mr. Bronzan was named supervisor of the Fresno District Fair art show in 1972. That August, he was named director of the Fresno Foster Grandparents Program. He volunteered along with others older than 60 to work with children lacking parents and families.

In 1979, Mr. Bronzan was elected chairman of the Fresno-Madera Counties Service Area Task Force, which developed the Area Agency on Aging for the two counties.

"My role has always been in making things happen, motivating other people, staying behind the scenes," he said. "That's what I like best."

Mr. Bronzan began a house-sharing organization for older companionship. He saw being among the older population as an opportunity.

"I just said to the world at age 55, 'Well, here I am!'" he recalled.

Mr. Bronzan worked for the foster grandparents program, and suggested to business people having trouble finding night watchmen that they have senior watchmen working four-hour shifts. They accepted.

In 1984, then-California Assembly Speaker Willie Brown reappointed Mr. Bronzan to the California Commission on Aging and Long-term Care.

Jo Johnson, director of the Fresno and Madera counties aging agency, called Mr. Bronzan "an instigator who helps. He was very much the advocate for seniors. He just felt as he was aging that seniors in general needed better services."

Bruce Bronzan said of his father:

"He had a beautiful life of continuing service.

"Seventy of his 90 years were dedicated to community service."

Bruce Bronzan said his mother, Peggy, has been ill but visited Mr. Bronzan regularly in the hospital. Bruce Bronzan was taken by family feelings of togetherness and love in the final hours around Mr. Bronzan's hospital bed:

"It was so fitting that he had such a peaceful, gentle way to die with people he loved all around him."

Mr. Bronzan is survived by his wife; two daughters, Mary Bronzan and Ann McDonald; and son Bruce.

Memorial services and a luncheon will be held beginning at 10:30 a.m. Sunday at the Piccadilly Inn University, 4961 N. Cedar Ave.

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