



## Raymond Thomas Jr

January 14, 1930 - January 20, 2020

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Santa Barbara lost a great asset to the community and wonderful man when Ray Thomas passed away on January 20th, 2020. He was 90 years old.

Memorializing his life and achievements is an undertaking as he was a respected businessman, philanthropist, husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Ray was born in 1930 to Ray Sr. and Gertrude Thomas in Long Beach, California. He was raised in Pomona and his parents had a home on a hill just on the outskirts of town where they sold used furniture. He spent his childhood learning from his parents to treat people fairly, respectfully and with a sense humor.

Ray was in the National Guard when he was called up for duty in the Korean Conflict and was honorably discharged in 1952. Upon his return, he opened a small, used furniture store in Pomona and later opened "Thomas Furniture Store" a much larger store with new, upscale inventory. At that time, his parents owned a big band ballroom, "The Rainbow Gardens" where all the famous bands came to play and people came to dance. Ray worked at the door on weekends to meet girls, of course, and one night he reconnected with a young girl he had met 2 years before. He and Sunni were married 3 months later. She must have been the right one as they were married for 64 years. Ray and Sunni worked together in the furniture business for about three years before starting a family in Claremont.

Life with Ray was never dull and soon a new venture was on the horizon when a family friend invited Ray and Sunni to see his land development project in Palmdale. Ray became very interested in land development and began researching land that he thought had potential of being a vacation destination. He discovered the beautiful Escalante Valley in southern Utah. He formed Ray Thomas Enterprises, Inc. and bought over 3,000 acres of land and moved his young family to Las Vegas in the early '60s. Las Vegas was just beginning to boom and expand which meant lots of potential clientele. During their 10

years in Las Vegas, Ray and Sunni worked very hard promoting their land business and became very successful. Life in Vegas was also very exciting and full of nightlife, dinners and unusual surprise parties with celebrities such as Buddy Hackett, Don Rickles, Robert Goulet and more.

After quite a successful run, Ray moved his family to Santa Barbara and quickly renewed his furniture business acumen by buying and running Henry Levy Furniture Store while continuing his land endeavors in Escalante Valley.

Ray's true business calling was to find property that had an upside potential. This was an area that he excelled at throughout his life. Ray owned and operated a hotel on State Street, the Lyon's Moving and Storage building, owned an office building on Carrillo Street and owned and operated Golf 'n Fun on Hitchcock Way. He accomplished all that before getting into the RV Park business in 1979 when he purchased Flying Flags RV Park and Campground in Buellton. Capitalizing on his success, he purchased two more parks, Stagecoach RV Park in Banning and Santa Barbara Motor Court on De La Vina. Ray went on to partner in the Skypark Shopping Center in Chico and also owns a small commercial center in Santa Clarita.

Going to the office everyday was Ray's passion and hobby. He liked a challenge and was never one to back down. He loved to exercise his mind and share his experiences with others. And, he always liked to share a good joke! Ray went to the office as usual until the day he was admitted to the hospital.

Ray leaves behind his wife, Sunni, the love of his life. He also leaves behind his daughter, Lisa, his daughter-in-law, Shelise, his grandchildren, Kaia, Sage and son-in-law, Casey, and two great-grandchildren. He was predeceased by his son, Marty. The family laid Ray to rest with a beautiful ocean view at Santa Barbara Cemetery. Donations to Ray and Sunni's favorite causes are welcomed: Direct Relief, Transition House and CALM.