



Vincent Mezzio

April 26, 1927 - September 4, 2013

Vincent Mezzio, founder of the Montecito Avocado Ranch, a 40-acre avocado and lemon orchard and residential development in the heart of Montecito, has died. He was 86.

In 1976, Vince and his partners purchased the avocado and lemon grove bordered by Jameson and San Leandro Lanes and named it the Montecito Avocado Ranch. Five years later, he and his wife, Susan, moved from Tarzana to Montecito, and he became the full-time manager of the orchard. They lived in the original ranch house, built before the turn of the 19th century, until building their own house on the sub-divided property in 2002.

He is survived by his wife, Susan; their daughter Sandra; her husband, Gerald Velasco; and his grandson, Vincent; and numerous nieces and nephews.

The youngest of eight children, Vince was born at home near what is now Saugus, California, where his father was a dairy farmer. He attended a one-room schoolhouse until his family moved to the San Fernando Valley, where he attended Canoga Park High School. He interrupted his high school studies to join the Coast Guard during World War II, where he served in both the European and Pacific theaters. After graduating from high school, he attended Loyola University, but left after three years to work full-time - actually, more than full-time.

"He was always such a hard worker and worked two jobs at once," said his daughter, Sandra Velasco. "I remember when I was a little girl, he would come home from his job with the city, change into his Levi's, and then go to his next job as a builder."

He started as a carpenter, then became a contractor, and then earned a job as a building inspector for the City of Los Angeles. He formed a development company called Mezzio and Mezzio with his brother in Tarzana, and built office and commercial buildings in the San Fernando Valley. At the time of his death, Vince was still managing an office building in Tarzana, driving to his office there once a week.

In the late 1990s, after many years of wrangling with the County of Santa Barbara, Vince was allowed to split the Montecito Avocado Ranch into lots and sell them for residential development, although a large portion of the orchard in the center remained intact. When six houses were built, he became president of the homeowner's association, a position he held until a couple of years ago.

Chris Gabriel, current president of the Montecito Avocado Ranch homeowner's

association, recalls how passionate Vince was about the avocado orchard he farmed for over 30 years, and how he crafted the association's rules and regulations to maintain the orchard environment when he subdivided the ranch.

"It may say 'Montecito Avocado Ranch' on the entry gates, but most of us consider it 'Vince's Avocado Ranch'," said Gabriel. "We are very appreciative of Vince's foresight and will do our best to maintain his legacy."

Neighbors remember Vince's dedication to the community, including maintaining the water well and common areas, among other things. "He was the patriarch of the Montecito Avocado Ranch," said Kenny Slaughter, a former neighbor whose company built three of the houses in the development. "He was a presence there all the time."

"We all loved and respected our patriarch and we will miss him profoundly," said one of his neighbors, Barbara Stupay, who is organizing an effort to honor his contribution to the avocado orchard with a plaque.

In addition to the Montecito Avocado Ranch, he also developed a condominium complex on the beach in Carpinteria called "Villa Sortino," the name of the village in Italy from which his parents had migrated.

Active in Mount Carmel Catholic Church, Vince also dined at Via Vai restaurant every Friday night and he enjoyed joking with his friends and family. As a long-time Notre Dame football fan, he especially liked teasing his grandson "Little Vince," who attends the University of Southern California, "Big Vince's" least favorite football team.

Vince was also passionate about his garden, especially his beloved fava beans and artichokes.

But most of all, Mezzio will be remembered for his willingness to help those in need. "He always took care of everybody," said Sue Mezzio, his wife of 53 years. "He was the smartest man I ever knew. There was nothing he couldn't do or fix."

In lieu of flowers, his family asks that memorials be sent to Heal the Ocean or the American Heart Association.

Susan and Sandy would like to thank their dear friends and family who have given so much love and comfort. They send deep gratitude to the doctors and the nurses in the Cottage Hospital MICU, especially Emily, who cared for Vince and gave the family such support.

Services were held at Mount Carmel Church on Monday, Sept. 9.

Cemetery

Events

Santa Barbara Cemetery

901 Channel Drive

Santa Barbara, CA, 93108

SEP

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Memorial Mass

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Catholic Church

1300 East Valley Rd., Santa Barbara, CA, US, 93108