

Stephen Ewing Ronfeldt

Grandfather, tireless legal advocate, gifted athlete

Claremont native Stephen Ewing Ronfeldt, 76, died December 1 in Berkeley, California after a long battle with cancer.

Steve was born October 28, 1942 in Pomona to Louis and Emily (Lyon) Ronfeldt. He was raised in Claremont, attending Webb School then Claremont High School (class of 1960), where he excelled in tennis and basketball. He was student body president of Whitman College in Walla Walla, Washington, where he met Suzy, who would become his wife of 53 years.

At Whitman he was also a Northwest District NAIA singles and doubles tennis champion, and a four-year letterman in basketball, winning the 1964 Borleske Trophy, given annually to the school's top male athlete. He remained active throughout his life, and was nationally ranked in tennis up through 2017.

He graduated from the University of California, Berkeley's School of Law in 1967 and was immediately put to work as part of President Lyndon Johnson's "war on poverty," training as a Reginald Heber Smith Fellow.

In 1996, after years of legal services, he co-founded the Public Interest Law Project in Oakland, California.

"Not only did Steve have a tremendously impactful career in legal services, he also had a wonderful outlook and deep humanity that brought joy, optimism and comradeship to everyone with whom he worked," said Bay Area Legal Aid.

Mr. Ronfeldt was awarded the 2018 Loren Miller Legal Services Award for his 50 years on the front lines fighting for low-income people across the country and for his mentoring of many like-minded passionate advocates.

He loved hiking with family in Yosemite, backpacking in Desolation Valley, swimming in the Pacific and skiing the Sierras.

He is survived by his wife, Suzy; children Lara, Heidi (Orion Weiner), Matthew (Meera); grandchildren Michael and Maria Javier, Kai and Mia Weiner, and Kamari and Avalina Ronfeldt; brother David; and sister, Helen Donovan.

A memorial service was held earlier this month in Berkeley.