

Save Rural Angwin and Angwin Community Lose a Friend

The residents of Angwin are much like the residents of the rest of Napa County. They do not want to see this place become a place which has sacrificed its farmlands and natural environments for urban sprawl.

We fight our own battle for preservation of agricultural land, meadows and woodlands. For many Seventh-day Adventist families in Angwin – and they constitute 40% of the population – this is a “holy cause” because their founding fathers wanted a college here which would be surrounded by the natural world. In this respect they and their fellow residents have found common cause.

Years ago we were faced with the threat of 900 houses on the watershed of our local water company. We fought that battle and we won.

Last week Volker Eisele, a Pope Valley grape-grower and land conservation advocate, died and newspapers throughout the San Francisco Bay Area are carrying front page stories on his courage and vigor. He was a friend to every area in Napa County which faced an urbanizing development they did not want.

He became a friend to Angwin.

* Thirty-one years ago, Volker came to Upper Napa Valley Associates with an appeal that UNVA support a grassroots crusade for protection of agricultural land. The UNVA Board was persuaded and began taking positions against development projects which would cost Napa County its agricultural lands on the valley floor and its green forests climbing the hillsides.

* When Volker produced an initiative, Measure J, to prevent commercial or residential development on agricultural lands, Angwin residents led the campaign here. And Angwin voters helped to make Measure J win.

* A PUC professor, Dowell Martz, had come to public attention as an opponent of inappropriate developments. Volker was impressed with that leadership and persuaded Dowell to run for supervisor for Napa County. Angwin worked wholeheartedly in the campaign. Dowell won and served for eight years as one of the best supervisors in this District. Volker’s perceptions had made that happen.

* Volker brought his inspiration and experience to Angwin more recently when large-scale residential and commercial developments were proposed here. Volker believed that agricultural lands and the natural environment on Howell Mountain should be protected as vigorously as in any other part of Napa County. When 580 houses were proposed for Angwin by a Seattle developer, Volker was outraged. He joined the leadership of Save Rural Angwin in a determined protest. That plan was defeated and a series of projects since then brought to a halt.

The future of Angwin still hangs in the balance, but the decision makers are bound to hear some of Volker’s arguments and admonitions still reverberating in the walls. He has given vision to our work, wisdom to our efforts, courage to our cause. Through the years, Volker Eisele became part of this community’s history.

Volker Eisele was Angwin’s friend.