

El Sobrante business owner, civic leader Bill Oliver dead at 96

Owner of Oliver's Hardware and Rancho Sports Bar

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EL SOBRANTE — Bill Oliver, a longtime El Sobrante businessman and civic leader who was an advocate for the small town, has died. He was 96.

Oliver was the longtime owner of Oliver's Hardware, opened in 1943, one of the first businesses in the town, located in unincorporated West Contra Costa. The Olivers also own Rancho Sports Bar, a popular spot for karaoke and country music.



Bill Oliver, 96, a longtime El Sobrante business owner and civic leader, has died. El Sobrante Historical Society

“He was just always there for everyone and a good person who always made sure the community’s needs were taken care of,” said Al Kirkman, a retired De Anza High School counselor and community activist.

The Olivers are considered pioneers in El Sobrante, which has a population of under 13,000 inhabitants and where many residents know each other. Bill Oliver took over the family business in 1948, handing over the reins to his son Richard about a decade ago.

Oliver, who died Wednesday, was a founding member of the El Sobrante Chamber of Commerce and the first grand marshall of the El Sobrante Stroll, an annual event started 23 years ago.

“Bill was a major force in the El Sobrante community for decades,” said Contra Costa Supervisor John Gioia, who represents the area. “He was a business leader and a civic leader who cared about making El Sobrante a better place to live and work.”

Without a City Hall or mayor to steer the town, El Sobrante's seat of power centers around local businesses and the Chamber of Commerce. The town takes its name from the Spanish word for surplus land, deeded to Victor and Juan Jose Castro.

"In El Sobrante, we more or less govern ourselves," said Kirkman. "It's a place where people really are in charge."

Bill Oliver is survived by son Richard and various grandchildren. Memorial services are pending.