

Hats Off to Bill Lofthouse

Builder of Family, Friendships and Rose Parade Floats

Bill Lofthouse, widely regarded as the “Granddaddy of Rose Parade float builders,” died July 5 following a short illness.

Lofthouse began his affiliation with Pasadena’s

Tournament of Roses Parade in 1955 when he began working with Isabella Coleman, a pioneer of modern day parade float design. He met his late wife Gretchen Lofthouse at the Coleman float facility; the couple went on to found Phoenix Decorating Co., and develop the firm into the largest commercial builder of Rose Parade floats. The company annually creates nearly half the floats featured in the internationally renowned parade.



He was active in the greater-Pasadena community, the festival industry, and a wide variety of philanthropic endeavors. He was an active member of the Board of Directors of the Methodist Hospital Foundation in Arcadia, was a former city councilman in Bradbury, CA, past president of the Pasadena YMCA Board of Directors, past president and continuing member of the Pasadena Optimist Club and past president of the University Club of Pasadena.

He was a moving force in major events throughout the country and around the world and his outstanding contributions to the festival industry garnered him the singular honor of election to the International Festivals and Event Association Hall of Fame. He also was a founding member and past president of the California Festivals and Events Association (CalFest) and past president of the International Festivals and Events Association (IFEA).

“Bill Lofthouse was an icon in the festival

industry. A true visionary, Bill pushed the boundaries of creativity and technology by bridging the modest early float designs into the spectacular creations found in the Rose Parade today. He was a wonderful

ambassador for the Tournament of Roses in the festival business due to his high standards of ingenuity, entertainment and his unique ability to build and maintain relationships. His legacy will live on through future Rose Parades but his gentle presence will be greatly missed,” said Corky Conzonire, 2009 Tournament of Roses President.

Prior to concentrating the focus of Phoenix Decorating Co. on the Rose Parade, the firm was the exclusive

builder of floats for the Orange Bowl Parade in Florida and the Fiesta Bowl Parade in Arizona simultaneous with its activities in Pasadena on Jan. 1. Lofthouse also guided his company’s creation of floats in the Coca Cola 100th Anniversary Celebration, Kentucky Derby Festival, Indianapolis 500 Festival Parade and the National Day celebration in Singapore.

His philanthropy included such groups as the Methodist Hospital, Optimist Boys & Girls Home in Los Angeles, Pasadena’s Police Athletic League and the YMCA of Pasadena. He had recently been honored by Methodist Hospital with its Crystal Ball Award, Cedars of Sinai Hospital, the Police Athletic League and was named as “Man of the Year” by the Pasadena YMCA.

Funeral services were held July 10 at Our Savior Lutheran Church in Arcadia.

Donations may be made in his name to Methodist Hospital Foundation, 626-898-8888, P.O. Box 60016 Arcadia, CA 91066-9976.