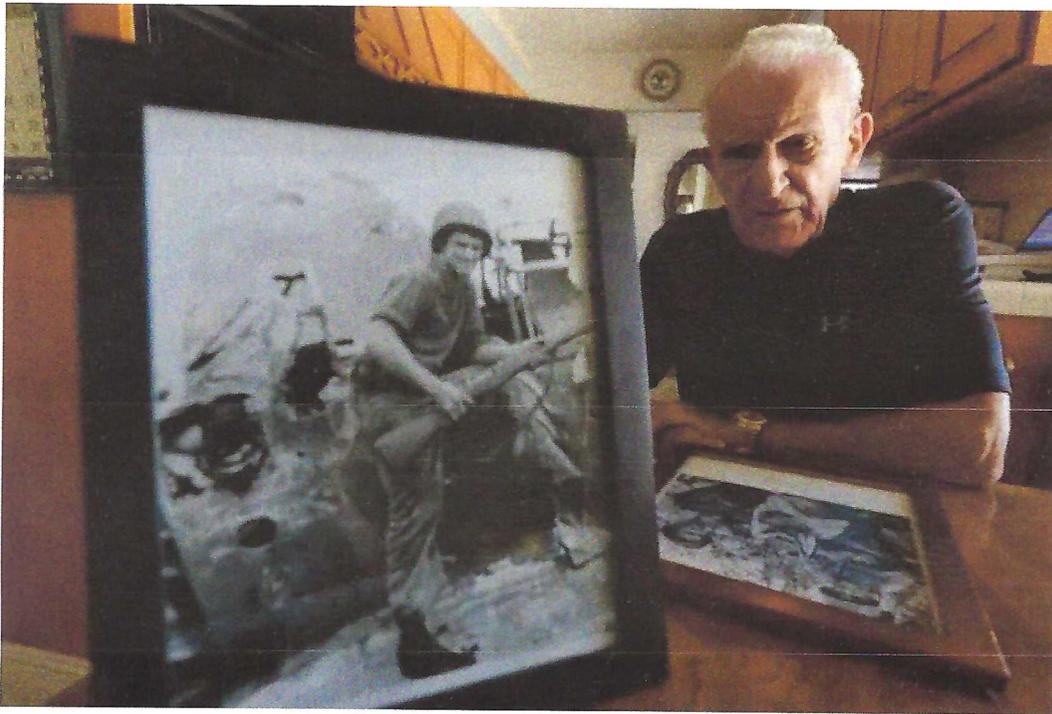


NEWS > NEWS OBITUARIES • News, Obituary

## 'Rico' Cinquini, a WWII vet who pushed for Oakley's cityhood, dies at 96

Assemblyman Frazier honored former Marine corporal as District 11's 2017 Veteran of Year



Former Marine and World War II veteran Enrico Cinquini recalls stories from his service during WWII at his home in Oakley, Calif. on Wednesday, Aug. 5, 2015.



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OAKLEY — Enrico “Rico” Cinquini, a longtime community leader and World War II veteran who helped pave the way for Oakley’s incorporation in 1999, died peacefully on Nov. 4 after a battle with esophageal cancer. He was 96.

An icon in Oakley, Cinquini was named Oakley Citizen of the Year in 1992 and again in 2003 for his lifetime achievements. He served on several committees over the years, including the Oakley Fire Board, the Oakley Municipal Advisory Council and, most recently, the Diablo Water District Board.

A champion for Oakley well before its incorporation, he continued to stay involved in civic matters throughout his life, regularly taking a front seat at Oakley City Council meetings for decades and only resigning from the water district when he fell ill last year.

“He was never at the dinner table because he was always very involved with the community,” said daughter Anna Lamothe, of Antioch. “He exemplified the qualities and character of the Greatest Generation. He believed in service to his country, community and family.”

Assemblyman Jim Frazier, D-Fairfield, was a friend and remembered Cinquini in a social media post.

“We always called him the godfather of Oakley because he absolutely was in love with his community and was involved in the incorporation of the city,” wrote Frazier, who honored Cinquini, a World War II Marine corporal, as Assembly District 11 Veteran of the Year in 2017.

Not willing to wait for Uncle Sam’s call, Cinquini enlisted in the Marines when he was just 17 and was involved in several of the war’s biggest battles in the Pacific theater. He was nicknamed “Four Star Cinquini” for the four landings he survived: New Guinea, Cape Gloucester, Peleliu and Okinawa.

While fighting in Peleliu, Cinquini and another Marine met Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal, who would later become famous for taking an iconic photo at Iwo Jima. On Peleliu during a bloody battle, Rosenthal asked Cinquini and another Marine if they were from San Francisco and if a flag was close by. A photograph of the proud Marines would later run in a San Francisco newspaper.

After returning from the war, Cinquini, a San Francisco native, married his longtime sweetheart, Rose Del Barba, whom he’d met when she was just 15 at one of many Italian gatherings in Oakley. He later opened a Rexall Drug Store. In 1952 he received his real estate license and then worked for CBC Realty, later his own business. He retained his broker’s license and continued to work from home until nearly the end of his life, said Lamothe, who noted that her father got involved in real estate when Oakley was just beginning to grow from a sleepy little town on the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

“It was inevitable that it was going to grow, and my dad was there at the forefront selling what the builders were building,” she said. “He had a great knowledge of the land in Oakley and was very involved in land usage. He used to say he probably sold every piece of land there two or three times.”

Tom Torlakson, a former state Assemblyman and Contra Costa supervisor, remembers working with Cinquini in the 1990s and remained close friends with him.

"He was Mr. Oakley," Torlakson said. "He helped bring people together. He had a huge heart, and his word was gold."

Torlakson, who met with Cinquini regularly for breakfast, said he considered him a "trusted adviser and a fabulous community champion" who supported forming a science center at Big Break Regional Shoreline.

"He wanted to educate students about the Delta, the migration of the salmon and the birds that enriched the environment," he said. "He cared about the community; he cared about our schools. He really believed in the power of reading and of literacy and books."

To that end, Torlakson said Cinquini will be remembered for pushing for a community library, helping to make it possible inside Freedom High School when it opened in the 1990s. Lamothe said her father was an avid reader, even asking her to read the daily newspaper to him when his eyesight worsened.

"Up until his last day he was very sharp," said Lamothe, who worked with her dad for 25 years in real estate. "He knew people, his memory was sharp until the end, and he was meticulous keeping a journal every day for decades. His red diary had the day's temperature, every phone call, every meeting, every luncheon. There was 40 years of that."

As a member of the Oakley Municipal Advisory Committee, Cinquini also will be remembered as a big supporter of Oakley cityhood. Dennis Nunn recalled working for several years with Cinquini as co-chair of the incorporating committee.

"He put a lot of time and effort into that," he said. "When Oakley became a city, some wanted him to be mayor, but he declined."

Cinquini, who founded the city's first businessmen's association, would later be honored with the Chamber of Commerce's first Pioneer Award in 2008 for his involvement and support. Energetic and fit up nearly till the end, Cinquini used to joke that he "could run circles around everyone," his daughter said, noting that he was still driving until age 94. He even took a trip to Oahu to visit the USS Arizona Memorial at Pearl Harbor with companion Joanne Byer and her family last year, she added.

"He had a full and good life," Lamothe said. "Coming back from that war in itself was a miracle. He had many close calls, and he came back to do all the good he could for the community. For everyone he touched he made things better."

In addition to Lamothe, survivors include daughter Ricci Ann Silva, of Oakley, grandson Andrew Lamothe, great-grandson Ares Lamothe and his companion Byer. His wife of 62 years, Rose, preceded him in death in 2009. Because of the pandemic, no services are planned.

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