

Educator, restaurateur Ellis Dunn dies



Ellis Dunn
Died Saturday while
visiting daughter

Longtime Clark College instructor, administrator owned Ridgefield cafe

By **HOWARD BUCK**
Columbian staff writer

Ellis Dunn, longtime Clark College sociology instructor and administrator who spent his "retirement" crafting lush desserts and charming visitors with rich conversation in Ridgefield's popular Pioneer Street Cafe, has died.

Dunn, 77, died Saturday in Trout Lake during one of many visits to

his daughter's home.

He had battled lung cancer, and carried an oxygen tank the past year or so.

Dunn, who was born on Leap Day and died on the Fourth of July, made countless friends during his years in Ridgefield.

They included Allene Wodaege, who treated him to lunch at the nearby Starliner Food Market deli just last week.

"He will be missed by so many people in the community. It will leave a hole in all our lives," Wodaege said. "He was one of the kindest, dearest people I ever met. He was a

real gentleman" who never drew a negative word, she said.

In fact, the gregarious Dunn served as grand marshal of Ridgefield's July 4th parade a year ago.

More recently, the voracious reader would tear through "nearly a book a day," Wodaege said. But his real joy came from engaging people, she and others said.

Roaming the five short blocks from his home to the restaurant he purchased in 1999, Dunn also made a habit of visiting other shopkeepers and neighbors.

"Just a wonderful man, everybody liked him," said Cathy

Hughes, who with her husband, Scott, operate Ridgefield Hardware just across the street.

That community will get a chance to bid farewell at a memorial service set for 2 p.m. Monday at the Old Liberty Theater in Dunn's beloved adopted town.

Donations may be made to the Ellis Dunn Scholarship Fund at Clark College, through the Clark College Foundation. The college has not yet scheduled any remembrance.

Gardner Funeral Home in White Salmon is handling arrangements; there will be no funeral.

30 years at Clark

In May, Dunn had joined Clark College leaders who opened a 25-year time capsule to help celebrate the school's 75th anniversary in 2008-09.

Last autumn, Clark officials honored the 30-year employee by naming the trustee meeting room in rebuilt Gaiser Hall as the Ellis F. Dunn Community Room. At the dedication, Dunn called the room a place where "dreams" for the future and academic excellence

Dunn:

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would be hatched.

Dunn saw and experienced much in his own life, which led from gritty days on his family's cotton farm in Texas to brief service as acting Clark College president.

He was born Feb. 29, 1932, and raised in tiny Anton, in the wind-swept Texas Panhandle not far from Lubbock.

His father died when he was 4. By age 8, the Depression, the Dust Bowl and his worsening asthma prompted his mother to send him west on a Greyhound bus, to live with grandparents in Calexico, Calif. She and his sister would soon follow.

Dunn returned to Texas to earn a sociology degree from Texas Technological College.

He later received a master's degree from the University of Oregon, but dropped graduate studies when a daughter was born with a serious heart defect. She died at age 2 following open-heart surgery, and Dunn joined the Clark faculty in Vancouver in 1959.

He taught for 11 years, became dean and spent one year as acting president before he retired in 1989, mostly to tend to his seriously ill wife, Lynne. He was only 57.

Lynne died in February 1990. His final position had been assistant dean of instruction and student services.



STEVEN LANE/Columbian files

Ellis Dunn, left, Barbara Kerr and Bob Knight open a time capsule assembled for Clark College's 50th anniversary during a 75th anniversary celebration in May.

Final flourish

Dunn quickly plunged into volunteer work. He was active with the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District, the Vancouver Rotary Foundation, Alzheimer Disease Support Systems, The Elahan Center for Mental Health, Southwest Washington ACLU and the Music Arts Series.

But, weary of endless meetings and prodded by his daughter, Lyris Wooldridge, he purchased the Pioneer Street

Cafe, an Italian eatery a mere five blocks from his Ridgefield home, in 1999.

Built in 1903, the building had once housed a butcher and a bakery.

With Wooldridge cooking main dishes — a duty that now falls to Dunn's granddaughter Jessica Marugg, helped by her sister, Michelle Marugg — Dunn was free to indulge his tasty obsession.

He cranked out homemade ice cream, and concocted a dense, chocolate "Earthquake Cake," among other favorites.

"For years, he made all the desserts. That was his specialty," his friend Wodaegé said. "He was an avid reader of eating and cooking magazines. It was a passion with

him."

Dunn finally stepped aside from work in the cafe on Valentine's Day 2008, his daughter said. But just recently, he felt well enough to turn out a few more desserts, she said.

"He had to retire earlier than he wanted to, to care for his wife," Wooldridge said, explaining the restaurant purchase. "It was a good way for him to connect, I think. And Ridgefield was very welcoming of him."

That welcome never wore out. By Tuesday, friends had built a small memorial shrine outside the Cafe doors, she said.

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