

Community Comment
July 20, 2014
Sam Pennisi

Allen Shaw and Mad River Hospital

That we live in an exceptional place is not lost on the vast majority of us. We are here for many reasons. Some of us were born here to families that came generations ago and carved out a life. Some came more recently to seek out a life. Some came because they sought employment opportunity and a life style that included the great outdoors. Some came here for a quality education at Humboldt State University and discovered a community that fit their needs as well. It strikes me that most of us who call this county home have a few things in common; a strong connection to our environment and an interest in building and being part of a community.

I came in 1966 because of Humboldt State. I discovered the sense of community soon after. In 1968, Allen Shaw came to look at the possibility of building a new hospital in Arcata. In today's world, what happened next occurred at warp speed. In about three years, Allen Shaw and the Arcata community were able to purchase the land, design the plans that were necessary, secure the financing and permits for a hospital, and finish construction. The Mad River Community Hospital opened on October 22, 1972. Allen Shaw not only built the hospital but chose to live here as well. He was with this community for 42 years until his passing on May 26, 2014.

Mr. Shaw had a remarkable life. The short story is that he grew up in Arizona before moving to Southern California. During the depression, he worked at Douglas Aircraft. That led him to working on aircraft as a soldier during World War Two.

Back in Los Angeles after the War, he entered the world of developing hospitals. With five hospitals under his belt, he came to Humboldt County and built Mad River.

We don't think about hospitals much. We do when we or a loved one is sick. Or perhaps when we have our children. Both of mine were born at Mad River. One of my grandchildren was born there and we are expecting our third to be born there any day. Having a community hospital fills most of the health care needs of a community. Mad River has emergency room capability, a birthing center, recovery rooms, laboratories, out patient facilities, and adult day health care. It does all the things a good hospital should do.

But hospitals do more than health care. They are part of the foundation of a community. They provide a full range of employment from janitors to office workers to nurses and doctors. They attract new and skilled people to our area. They teach our young people about the health care industry. And they provide an opportunity for volunteers to give back their community.

Hospitals are vital to the success of a community. Mad River Hospital has been and will continue to be an important part of Arcata, Humboldt County, and the North Coast Region. And most of that is due to Allen Shaw and his vision for Mad River Hospital.

From me and his community, thank you.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment.