

CPRS – Champion in the Community Award

Ernie Sheldon, a retired Lt. Col from the United States Air Force after 33 years of service, moved to Folsom in 1985. Shortly after his arrival to Folsom, Ernie dropped into the newly formed recreation division office with the simple question, “Can I help?” He was soon appointed to the city’s park and recreation commission, in which he served for two decades, including many years as chairman. Folsom had four parks when Ernie arrived, all built by community civic organizations. Today, largely due to his vision, tireless leadership and lobbying, Folsom has 48 parks and a whole compliment of recreational facilities. To accomplish this, Ernie partnered with his fellow park and recreation commissioners in drafting the city’s first comprehensive park and recreation master plan. To implement this plan, he successfully guided the adoption of the Park Land Dedication ordinance, and the city’s first Park Improvement Fee. This allowed the city to receive park land and ensure that the funds would be available to build them.

Ernie soon became the executive director of the Folsom Athletic Association (FAA). He has found numerous creative ways to raise over a million dollars to help leverage city and grant funds to build the aquatic center and northern California’s first multi-use synthetic youth football field, a lighted soccer field, and two lighted softball fields at Livermore Community Park. With Ernie’s guidance, the FAA has become more than a park and recreation advocate for facilities and has become a model organization for other park and recreation agencies statewide. Today the association manages through Ernie’s leadership seven on-going impactful programs not to mention numerous special events and sponsorship funds:

- The Lembi Community Park concession program.
- The Youth Assistance Scholarship Fund.
- The Adopt-a-Facility program.
- Three memorial scholarships award nine scholarships to each of the Folsom’s two high schools.
- Two memorial scholarship funds provide uniforms and equipment for youth in need for little league and soccer.
- In collaboration with the city the FAA helps operates and manages the Folsom Teen Council operation account.
- The FAA partnered with the City of Folsom’s 3rd annual fashion show as a fundraiser for recreational inclusionary programs.

Ernie's collaborative leadership style has allowed him to partner with many community organizations and individuals. Four of the most impactful partnerships he developed are:

- Expansion and improvements of the city's joint-use agreement with the Folsom Cordova Unified School District allowing for over 233 facilities to be used for the city's programs and the FAA's 15 community youth sports leagues. Due to Ernie's positive reputation, Ernie was asked to be a signer for three different school improvement bonds, in which he was able to help lobby for the inclusion of athletic facilities that included football stadiums, gyms, a pool and a performing arts facility to name a few.
- The FAA partnered with the Friends of the Folsom Parkway for the city's first Trail Day in developing the first mile of trail for Folsom.
- As a former library commissioner and one of the original directors of the Friends of the Folsom Library, he played a key role in partnering with the Folsom Library Commission in identifying City Lions Park as the best location for a new state-of-the-art library. The result of this project included the addition of a flag court honoring all branches of the military and preserved the decommissioned fire station to be used for a senior and arts center.
- The Wayne Spence Veterans Day Parade has grown to over 3000 participants and 10,000 spectators with Ernie's leadership since Wayne Spence first walked alone with an American Flag because the city did not have a veteran's day parade.

Ernie believed that being elected to the city council could help him to accomplish the projects and programs that he and his community partners identified. His attempts at running for city council brought him closer to the community and his desire to accomplish improvements he felt passionate about. Ernie was reelected in 2012 and 2016 having served as vice mayor in 2011 and 2013.

Ernie was recognized as early as 1996 with the city council naming a youth sports complex after Ernie due to his strong advocacy for park and recreation amenities and programs. In 2002, he was named California's outstanding park commissioner. Ernie's question, "Can I help?", has truly played a large part in this recognition of Folsom being named "best place to raise a family in the United States". Therefore, we highly recommend that councilman Ernie Sheldon be considered for the 2020 California Parks and Recreation Society, Champion in the Community Award.

Ernie Sheldon is truly the champion of the community of Folsom in which he loves to serve. He has spent thousands of volunteer hours in numerous capacities amongst the cities treasured organizations and partners. Ernie's passion to provide Parks and Recreation programs and facilities for all ages is unparalleled. His ability to find creative ways to support and raise money has commanded a significant economic impact. Ernie is a respected and beloved member of the city of Folsom.