

By Russ Pankonin

The Imperial Republican

The Imperial community lost a community icon with the death of long-time businessman and community supporter Willard Rouze.

Rouze, 89, passed away Thursday, March 11, after suffering from declining health conditions over the past three months.

Rouze will be remembered by locals for many things but first and foremost, he will be remembered as the local hardware man.

Rouze represented the third generation to operate Rouze Hardware, which spanned 100 years of continuous service to the Imperial area community.

He retired from the store and closed it in 2006, completing 100 years of operation by the family.

His service wasn't just limited to serving his hardware customers.

For nearly 60 years, Rouze served as the local weather observing, recording temperatures and precipitation daily.

He was recognized with several awards, including the Jefferson Award, one of the highest honors bestowed by the National Weather Service.

He was a founding member of the Imperial Public Power District, and served on the board for more than 30 years, many as its secretary/treasurer.

His hobby of collecting stamps also led him down a path of becoming technologically literate, using Apple computers to maintain his collection of more than 10,000 stamps.

He used the computer to create a display page and description for every stamp issued by the Postal Service.

He would fill the pages as he would add stamps. He sold off the collection about 10 years ago.

Two other loves of Rouze's were his church and the local library, but none more important than his wife of 58 years, Ava, and their family, sons Ned and Grant and daughter Nan.

He grew up in the home directly east of the community center. His only other home in Imperial was the home he made with Ava at 1110 Broadway St.

He was a member to the Imperial United Methodist Church for more than 50 years and served as treasurer of the building fund when the new church was built in 1992.

Rouze always took great interest in the library. He was a key proponent for building the \$1 million addition to the Lied Imperial Public Library.

He and his son, Grant, helped develop some of the first expansion plans for the library.

When the enlarged facility was dedicated in 2006, he and Ava cut the ribbon to officially mark the completion of the project.

Rouze was a longtime member of the Imperial Masons, Purity Lodge 198. He served as secretary/treasurer for many years, was awarded a 60-year membership pin and was a 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason.

He received one the Masons' highest awards, the Humanitarian Award in the late 1990s.

In addition to his work in the hardware store, he also served as a substitute rural mail carrier for 15 years.

A complete obituary appears on page 5.

