

SPORTS

FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2006

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GREEN VALLEY NEWS & SUN B1

Cycling friends remember Fred Hettig

By Bill Adamson
and John Sweet

Nandor "Fred" Hettig died on March 22 after being struck by a car while riding his bicycle. This is our effort to tell the Green Valley community of the man we knew and loved as a friend.

He said his given name "Nandor" means Ferdinand in English, so most of us knew him as Fred.

He was one of those unique personalities that you never forget because of his many positive qualities, his escape from the Iron Curtain and his pleasant demeanor.

His friends and especially cyclists still struggle with the untimely passing of their friend because of this accident, which was so irreconcilable with what they knew of his biking ability, customs and choice of routes.

He was a proud Hungarian and a freedom fighter who immigrated to the United States in 1956 after the failed Hungarian revolution. He escaped with the clothes on his back.

His father had been taken by the Russians in November 1944 and was never seen or heard from again. His mother stayed in Hungary, and Fred visited her annually after it was safe for him to return. His mother died there a few years ago.

Joined Paratroopers

Fred had been trained in Hungary as a tool and die maker so he brought excellent skills to the United States. He became a United States citizen. He joined the Army Paratroopers in February 1959.

He told some of us that the first jump was with some ap-



PHOTO BY DON SPEAR

GREEN VALLEY cycling enthusiast Fred Hettig passed away on March 22. He is survived by his wife, Helen, and his daughters, Kathy and Christine.

prehension, but that there was a hand to help for indecisiveness. He served two years in Germany, two in New Jersey, and shorter stints in South Carolina, Tennessee and Kentucky.

Fred met his future wife, Helen Jakschitsch, in St. Louis, to which she had emigrated from Austria in 1950. They were married in July 11, 1959. She, and daughters Kathy and Christine, along with five grandchildren, mourn Fred's passing.

Having lived behind the Iron Curtain, Fred appreciated our freedom. Fred and a couple of other friends went to a Heritage Foundation luncheon at the Air and Space Museum on March 1.

During the question-and-answer session following the speech, Fred asked why more U.S. citizens didn't get involved in what the recent Congress had done to the country with all the "pork" spending.

Fred could do any thing he set his mind to. He ran marathons. He tired of that, so he ran kicking a soccer ball the whole way.

Then, for something new, he rode a unicycle in marathons.

His life was a series of challenges he set for himself, apparently to test his own mettle, or just because that was what he enjoyed. He never bragged or talked much about his back-

ground, but would share his experience with those who had genuine interest. As we write this, we wish we knew more.

Agua Linda challenge

On our bicycle rides, Fred would frequently challenge his friends and sprint for the stop sign at the Agua Linda overpass south of Amado. Most of us would say, "there he goes again," and go chase him.

He would be stretching when we showed up for the start of our rides at West Center. Every once in a while, Fred would ride "no-hands" on the bike and stretch while riding.

We knew him as a careful

rider to avoid getting hurt. Most of the riders in our group graduated to biking shoes, which clip to the pedals of their bikes. He wouldn't use toe clips because he didn't want his feet to be locked in.

Fred was always smiling and joking. He would phone me in his Hungarian accent and say, "Eases Beeel there?" I'd say, "Hi Fred." Then, he'd respond, "How dit you know it vas me?"

Fred was always helping people. He rode a tandem bicycle with our blind friend, Bob Craft, and they pulled Bob's dog in a trailer behind the bike. Bob really enjoyed those rides. This was hard work, especially on the hills.

After a few years, Fred hurt his back and couldn't ride the tandem with all that weight, so Fred recruited a few of us to ride the tandem with Bob.

Fred was athletic and innovative. On one ride through Box Canyon, his tire sprung a leak. Since it was about 25 downhill miles to get home, he didn't think it was worthwhile to fix the tire on the road.

Downhill trek

He rode the bike sitting on the rack over the rear tire, leaning backward and balancing so the front wheel with the flat was up in the air. He rode this way the entire way home.

One of our joys was kidding around with each other. Occasionally, the jest would turn serious as he would impart something wise he had learned in the school of hard knocks.

He was an entrepreneur, producing a one-of-a-kind apparatus for paint spray guns.

As we understood it, no one else in the country filled this need. How wonderful, that an immigrant coming here with no English-language skills worked himself into that kind of achievement.

He also told us that he had built an environmentally friendly and energy-efficient home in Missouri. This was years before there was much thought of such a thing.

Special roof application

This is also where he developed his special roof application in 1972.

There was no customary financing for such an off-the-wall venture. Somehow, people learned he had this technique for repairing roofs in Green Valley.

He had more business than he wanted simply from the words of satisfied customers.

The last several years he became interested in gold prospecting. He haunted abandoned building sites to look for lost treasures with his metal detector.

Fred was such an interesting, innovative, kind, generous and patriotic person. He was a terrific friend, and a good husband and father.

We wish we could do this in more depth, but never thought we would have to remember it for such a shocking and sad occasion.

Our love and condolences go out to his family. May his soul be at peace.

John Sweet is one of the four original riders of the Green Valley TTS bicyclists that is being showcased in the Photo Exhibit with opening reception at West Center on April 20 at 4:30 p.m. Bill Adamson is also a member and is co-chair of the Santa Cruz Valley Bicycle Advocate Committee.)