

John Emery Fuller died gently on January 14, 2012 of pulmonary fibrosis. John was a gentle man and a gentleman whose life was guided by unswerving faith in God and love for his family and friends.

He was born in the Catskill Mountains at Fleischmanns, NY on December 31, 1920.

When John was in 5th grade his parents had to persuade his teacher to pass him. The teacher's husband worked at the same bank that John's father managed. John later learned that he had received a "conditional" acceptance into the 6th grade because his father influenced the teacher.

John demonstrated his engineering prowess while he was in junior high. He set up a connection under the floorboard adjacent to his desk at school which connected to the class bell. He would push his heel down on the floorboard and the class bell would ring, and the teacher would let all the kids go.

John attended Michigan State University, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and earned a degree with honors at the Bridgeport Engineering Institute where he completed his engineering degree. In 1942 he married Bette Cruickshank and they had a son, James.

John was instrumental in developing Belleayre Mountain Ski Center in Highmount, NY and he operated the Belleayre Mountain Store.

In 1941, he went to work for Sikorsky Aircraft in Stratford, CT, where he designed flying boats and helicopters and became a pilot. During World War II, he spent three years in the U.S. Naval Reserve assigned to American Airlines engineering department at La Guardia Field, NY for naval Air Transport Command.

After the war, he returned to Sikorsky and remained there for the next 27 years rising to the post of manager of mass properties engineering. Igor Sikorsky was a dapper little man who liked to wear a derby. John's office was adjacent to Sikorsky's and John's window allowed him to watch the test flights of the helicopters, some of which crashed.

During that time, the Society of Aeronautical Weight Engineers elected him president and an honorary fellow and he earned a listing in "Who's Who in Engineering."

He retired for the first time in 1978 and moved to San Clemente because of Bette's health. However, he couldn't stay idle and decided to accept a position with Convair Division of General Dynamics in San Diego where he was a group engineer on the Space Shuttle Orbiter at Lindbergh Field.

Northrop-Grumman, subsequently, recruited him as a group engineer for its B-2 Stealth Bomber. Testing of the B-2's avionics took place at Edwards Air Force Base during hours when the test airplane, a Boeing 737, would not be observed by Russian satellites. The plane was located about 100 yards from the hangar. One day, about dusk, John was working alone in the rear of the plane. A guard entered the plane and hollered, "Anybody here?"

As many of you know, John's hearing was not the best, so he failed to respond and the guard proceeded to lock the plane's entry door. When John finished his task he returned to the front of the plane and found the exit locked. After numerous attempts to find a way to exit, with darkness rapidly approaching, John went to the cockpit and used the method of last resort—he pulled the emergency escape lever and blew the door open.

He returned to the door and descended the rope ladder. As he reached the tarmac, two MPs grabbed him and took him back to the hangar for interrogation.

All's well that ends well. Fortunately, John's boss was still on site and John was released as soon as the MPs completed their report. It took a couple of weeks for Northrop to secure a new door assembly from one of the aircraft bone-yards and install it.

Thereafter, John was affectionately referred to as the "Door Man."

John loved innovation and 2000 he received a letter of appreciation from the Department of the Navy for 50 years of "dedication and hard work" during a career in aeronautical engineering.

John retired in January, 1991, married Kevin Mary Hannigan and they moved into Kevin's Mother's Leisure World manor in 1992. He was selected as the Historical Society's Honoree for January, 2001. At that event Bert Posthill, the Society's Honoree for March, 2003, saluted John with:

"I think it was Leonardo da Vinci who was asked to decide which of several machines was the most efficient. His response was very illuminating—he chose the one that made the least noise! There you have it—John Fuller fits

that bill to a tee. He is very effective and efficient and he does it without any fuss and bother. It's very deceptive—people don't realize how much he's doing since he accomplishes things without making any noise. John is so unassuming and quiet about his activities that most of us are unaware of all the things he has done.”

Bert then recognized John's election to the United Laguna Hills Mutual Board in 1997 and his service on the Maintenance and Construction Committee, his year as corporate treasurer and his year as president of the corporation—all accomplished with distinction. John was elected to the Golden Rain Foundation Board in 2001 and served as one of its vice presidents for two years.

Over the years, John Fuller was a valuable contributor to Leisure World's service clubs. John was: a vice president and board chair of the PC Computer Club, treasurer and a member of the board of the Community Association and vice president and program chair for the Aerospace Club.

John also volunteered as an escort/messenger at Saddleback Memorial Hospital for 10 years where he logged more than 2,000 hours. In 2001, he became a member of the Board of Directors of the Laguna Woods United Methodist Foundation and served as its secretary for more than 5 years. For several years John was the head usher at the early service in this church. Gil Edler and I served under him. Those were the days when it was not unusual for us to greet arriving members of the congregation with, “This is National Grouch Week. Please refrain from smiling.”

Those of us who knew John described him as: quiet, terrific, solid and diplomatic, a hugger and an outstanding contributor. In spite of his macular degeneration, he was a vociferous reader. He rarely complained in spite of the balance problems which caused him to lose his independence.

John Fuller spent more than 20 years of his life as an enthusiastic volunteer in this community. We have been blessed by his presence!