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## **CITY OF BRANSON**

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# ***NEWS RELEASE***

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## **City mourns death of former Branson mayor Lou Schaefer**



Lou Schaefer, who served as Branson's mayor during the biggest growth period in the city's history, died early this morning at the age of 80 following an illness. Family members say he passed away at a rehabilitation facility in Springfield.

Schaefer was mayor of Branson from 1995 to 2007, and he was the first mayor in Branson's history to be elected for six consecutive terms. He served two years on the Branson Board of Aldermen as mayor pro-tem prior to his election as mayor.

He was a strong supporter of economic development. During four years of his administration, 2004-2007, Branson experienced unprecedented growth with new construction topping \$583 million and major economic developments such as Branson Landing, the Branson Convention Center and hotel, and Branson Hills opening.

Schaefer's top priority when first elected mayor in 1995 was to see a convention center built in Branson. During the groundbreaking for the Branson Convention Center in October 2005, Schaefer called the event "...a dream come true for me."

During his tenure, Branson's city limits expanded from eight square miles in 1995 to 20 square miles in 2007. And by annexing, hundreds of dangerous old septic systems were connected to the city's sewer system.

Schaefer has been called Branson's First Ambassador because of his tireless efforts in promoting Branson as a vacation destination "where you can take any member of the family to any show or attraction and not be embarrassed with the content."

Always quick with a smile and handshake, he enjoyed being around people and was especially popular among city employees, according to city administrative assistant Vicki McFarland, who worked with Schaefer during his 12 years as mayor.

"He was so polite to everyone and a true gentleman," she said.

Schaefer placed high importance on environmental issues. He organized a regional water quality conference in 1996 that eventually led to the formation of the James River Basin Partnership. Under his leadership, Branson became the first city in Missouri to install phosphorus removal equipment on its wastewater treatment plants, and Schaefer continually encouraged other cities to add this equipment to the point that he became known as "Mr. Phosphorus."

A veteran of the Marine Corps, Schaefer especially anticipated the annual Veterans Homecoming in Branson that featured a week of activities and special events honoring military veterans. Schaefer attended practically every event to which he was invited, and for many homecomings, that meant 25-30 appearances in a seven-day period.

"I am so proud to be mayor of the city that has taken the national lead in paying tribute to all American veterans," Schaefer said at a Memorial Day Remembrance in 2000.

His accomplishments as mayor earned Schaefer the prestigious 2008 Missourian Award that he was to receive September 27 in Jefferson City.

A native of St. Louis, Schaefer moved to Branson in the early 1950's where he co-owned a wholesale business, owned hotels and later developed property. He is past president of the Branson/Lakes Area Chamber of Commerce and Convention and Visitors Bureau and served on the boards of Silver Dollar City, College of the Ozarks and the former Security Bank.

Visitation will be this Friday from 6-8 p.m. at Faith Lutheran Church, 221 Malone with services Saturday 10 a.m. also at the church. Burial will be at Snapps Bearden Cemetery on East Highway 76.