

Kathryn “Kitty” Catania Ragsdale

1913 – 2010

BUSINESSWOMAN, CIVIC LEADER

WRITTEN BY FAYE DAWDY, NIECE

Kathryn "Kitty" Catania, the second female child born to Mary and Vincenzo Catania, was named after her maternal grandmother, in accordance with Italian custom. Kitty's paternal grandparents and her father were immigrants from Isola delle Femmine, Palermo, Sicily, Italy; her mother was born in Pittsburg, California. Her maternal grandparents were Caterina (Aiello) and Frank Billeci and her paternal grandparents were Mary (Mercurio) and Salvatore Catania. The Aiellos are buried in the Pittsburg cemetery (located in Antioch) and the Catantias in San Carlos Cemetery in Monterey, California.

Kitty was born in Pittsburg on December 12, 1913, and shortly thereafter her parents moved the family to Monterey, which is where she lived the rest of her entire life. She said numerous times how lucky and proud she was that her parents decided to make their home in such a wonderful and perfect place. She had four brothers-- Frank, Vince, Salvatore and Sam--and four sisters--Mary (Torrente), Angela (Frontera), Estelle (Brucato) and Joanna (La Sala).



Kitty and Henry Ragsdale.

Kitty was in the Young Ladies Institute a catholic drill team that participated in the San Francisco World's Fair in 1939. She worked in the cannery with her sister Angie before they were both married and before World War II.

Kitty met and married Henry Ragsdale (many called him Red). They had one daughter, Kathryn, and one grandson, Henry. Together Kitty and her husband Henry started Bi-Rite Market on Casa Verde Way, which later became La

Sala's Bi-Rite Market, when her sister Joanna and husband Benny La Sala bought it. The market is now owned by Kitty's nephew and two grandnieces.

One of the most memorable things about Kitty Ragsdale was that she often wore a signature fresh rose in her hair on most days of her life, starting when she was a child living on Van Buren Street. On Valentine's Day she would hand deliver one rose to all of her many valentines, everyone she knew and held dear. So many people remember her thoughtfulness, including Bert Cutino who was always delighted to be remembered by her.

All the restaurants in town knew that she drank her coffee from a wine glass instead of a cup, with milk; and if she was asked if she wanted sugar, she would say, "I am sweet enough without added sugar."

She often gave directions by saying, "If you want to get anywhere around Monterey, just hug the ocean and you will find your way from one perfect place to the next."

Although Kitty had the means to buy anything she wanted, she wasn't impressed by modern technology. She never owned a microwave oven or an answering machine for her telephone. She only had one television set...and she never turned it on.

Kitty formed her own club called the 12/12 Club and celebrated with a notable group of people who had birthdays on December 12th.

Kitty considered herself a real lady. She loved her family unconditionally, and the family would gather for Sunday dinners with Kitty's mom Mary and her sister Mary and family on Van Buren Street.

Kitty was filled with boundless energy. Her quick mind, sharp wit, swift decision making and good time-management skills all came into play together and enabled her to put plans into action and accomplish all that she set out to do without wasting

a minute. She was an excellent goal setter whether working for the City of Monterey or her numerous organizations she was involved in.

She lived her life the way she wanted to; she was very content and confident. She was a member of the Pebble Beach Club and had a favorite table where she entertained and hosted her friends on Mondays for lunch.

She was a voracious reader and had a library in her home fully stocked with books relating to her interests, such as Native Americans, western culture, biographies, gardening and rocks and minerals. Even though Monterey was 100 miles from the big city of San Francisco, she always subscribed to the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the *San Francisco Examiner* because she wanted to keep up with all the latest news, including the social activities happening in and around The City.

Her husband Henry was an amateur jewelry designer and collected jade. He displayed his work at the Carmel Valley Gem Society shows and was best known for his donation of the large jade boulder he found at Jade Cove weighing in excess of 3000 pounds at the San Carlos Cemetery.

Kitty and Henry were world travelers, but her all-time favorite places to travel to were Yosemite in the winter, Hawaii and Mexico. Mexico, on December 12, celebrates the feast day of Our Lady of Guadalupe, and since her birthday was also on that day, she liked being south of the border then. She would jokingly say, “I’m going to Mexico--they are giving me a birthday party!”

Kitty used the word “bountiful” to describe herself. Although she was not a realtor, her hobby was investing in property in Monterey and Carmel Valley. She acted as her own property manager even into her 90s. You



could often see her dressed to the nines in her angora sweaters and wool pleated skirts, sitting on a porch to interview tenants.



Kitty in the rose garden.

Kitty and Henry were avid gardeners. Their properties were surrounded by flowers of all kinds, but of course roses, Kitty's favorite. When her husband of 54 years passed away in 1990, she planted over 100 rose plants in his memory.

In a 1968 published article written by Mary Rodrigues, Kitty was described as "indefatigable" and "energetic," and this pertained to every aspect of her life.

Kitty did not consider herself a political person, but her desire to help make Monterey the best place it could possibly be led her to become campaign manager for her closest and dearest friend, the late honorable Mayor Minnie Coyle, with whom she partnered on many occasions while working on the Monterey Planning Commission.

She also worked with Virginia Stanton, wife of Carmel Valley architect Robert Stanton, on many projects, including the committee for the construction of the Stanton Center located on the Custom House Plaza. The building was donated by the Stantons to the Monterey History & Art Association to house a Maritime Museum. After many years the maritime exhibit was removed and MHAA replaced it with the Salvatore Dali Exhibit.

Kitty was so proud that such a well-known and successful politician as Leon Panetta hailed from Monterey that she put aside any political differences she might have and faithfully supported him. Another famous person she loved talking to at events that they both attended was Clint Eastwood, and she always spoke highly of his kind spirit.

Kitty was the first woman appointed to the Monterey Planning Commission in the 1960s and served for ten years. She was past president of the Business and Professional Women's Club of Monterey and the Native Daughters of the Golden West. Kitty was a member of the Carmel Valley Gem and Mineral Society and the Navy League of U.S. Monterey Peninsula Council.

She loved decorating for events and gladly volunteered her skills as well as donating flowers many times. She was in charge of decorations for the Cascarones Ball put on yearly by the Monterey Civic Club. Most notably, she volunteered to decorate for Monterey's birthday celebration, La Merienda for over 50 years. La Merienda was started in 1929 by the Monterey History & Art Association to celebrate the June 3, 1770, founding of the city of Monterey. Kitty was past president of the Monterey Civic Club and was known for decorating the birthday cake with roses donated by the Civic Club. She placed all the roses around the cake and was so proud when her grandson, Henry Cartwright, helped carry the cake. She acted as *duena* at one of the Meriendas. (The *duena* is the chaperone for the girls of the court--La Favorita, and two Doncellas--during the Merienda event.) Kitty was given the Laura Bride Power Memorial Award for her dedication to the preservation of Monterey's heritage by the Monterey History & Art Association during the 1980 La Merienda.

She also yearly was a hostess during La Merienda and she sponsored tables at multiple other events on the Peninsula including for the Medal of Honor recipient and local hero General Jimmy Doolittle's 90th birthday party at Ford Ord.

Kitty was a charter member of the Quota Club and was honored as the club's woman of the year in 1976 and for her 25 years of membership award in 1983. She also supported the We Share Foundation through her involvement in the Quota Club.

In 1988 she was awarded Citizen of the Year by the Parade of Nations. She was honored by the Monterey Public Library League for her volunteer efforts there over

several years. She was on the Friends of the Monterey Fair Board and was honored at the Monterey Fair in 2002, where she was given many awards and accolades by representatives from Monterey County, congress and the U.S. Senate. She was honored by the mayor of Seaside in 2003.

Kitty was a member of the Historic Garden League; the National Federation of Republican Women, Carmel Chapter; Friends of Monterey Symphony and Pacific Grove National Historical Museum; and an auxiliary member of Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula and director of the Monterey Chapter of the Red Cross. She was a supporter of Monterey Peninsula College women's programs and was also a volunteer at the Crippled Children's and Adult Association.

A very notable event--and perhaps the one Kitty may be most remembered for--occurred in 1992 at the AT&T Pro-Am Golf Tournament, which she never missed attending as well as volunteering for. Comedian actor Bill Murray, during one of his showmanship acts to liven up the tournament, brought Kitty into the sand trap and danced with her until they both fell down. No one is quite sure if she felt special to be selected or a little too embarrassed to revisit the memory, but she never talked much about that. The incident is still featured by the PGA tour on YouTube's "The Best of Bill Murray at AT&T Pebble Beach" and is often replayed annually on television when the golf tournament is advertised.

In 2006 a resolution by the Monterey County Board of Supervisors honored Kathryn "Kitty" Catania Ragsdale as one of four prominent Italian Americans in Monterey County being recognized by the Italian Heritage Society AKA Italian American Cultural Center Foundation for her community service.

Upper and Lower Ragsdale Road located in the Ryan Ranch area of Monterey was named after Kitty and Henry Ragsdale for their contributions to the City of Monterey.



Kitty with siblings & their spouses: Mary and Ventura Torrente; Angie and Joe Frontera; Henry and Kitty Ragsdale; Frank and Melba Catania; Sam and Mary Lou Catania; Vince and Lillian Catania; Joanna and Benny La Sala; Estelle and George Brucato.



Kitty with her brother Frank Catania.



Kitty's daughter Kathryn and her grandson Henry.

Kitty died at age 96 in her home on December 1, 2010, missing her beloved 12/12 Club celebration by only a few days.

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