

Peter J. Coniglio

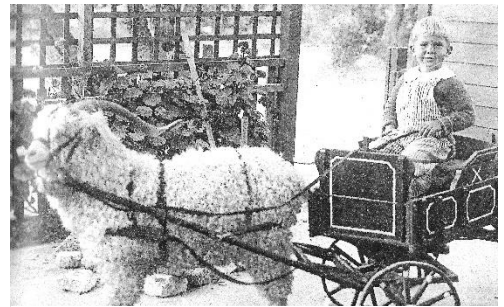
1929

LAWYER, MAYOR OF MONTEREY, BUSINESSMAN

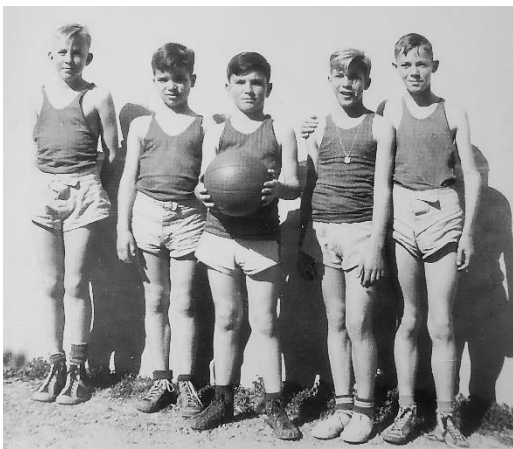
AS TOLD BY PETER CONIGLIO

Peter J. Coniglio, a well-known citizen of the Monterey Peninsula and member of a prominent family, retired in 2015 after an outstanding and eventful career in the practice of law and public service spanning a period of over 60 years. He has had a fully productive and rewarding life.

Peter was born on Jefferson Street in Monterey on May 6, 1929, the second son of Horace and Mary Ferrante Coniglio and grandson of Pietro Ferrante, the father of Monterey's modern sardine fishing and canning industry, which he began in 1903 as a fisherman and subsequently as a cannery owner in 1926.



Peter around 4-5 years old. A purveyor brought the sheep around the neighborhood.



Peter with boyhood friends.

In those early years Monterey was a small, close-knit community; neighborhood and school friends Peter grew up with have remained close throughout his life. To this day, those friends and neighbors still gather annually for the Old Gang Barbecue to reminisce on their childhood years. In school Peter gained a reputation as a good athlete, student and leader, as well as a loyal and supportive friend. His long history of leadership started when he was elected president of his second-grade class at Walter Colton

School. He later transferred to San Carlos Parochial School where he became an altar boy and sang in the choir.



Starting in 1943, he attended Monterey Union High School, where he was active in student government and excelled in athletics. As captain of the lightweight football and basketball teams he received all-league recognition in both sports. In 1946 the City of Monterey established the Monterey Boys Club, housed in part of the Cooper-Molera Adobe on Polk Street, as a place where students could gather for recreation and special



events. The student officers were elected by the members, and Peter was elected as the first secretary of the club. The meetings were held in the Monterey City Council Chamber, perhaps a preview of things to come for him.

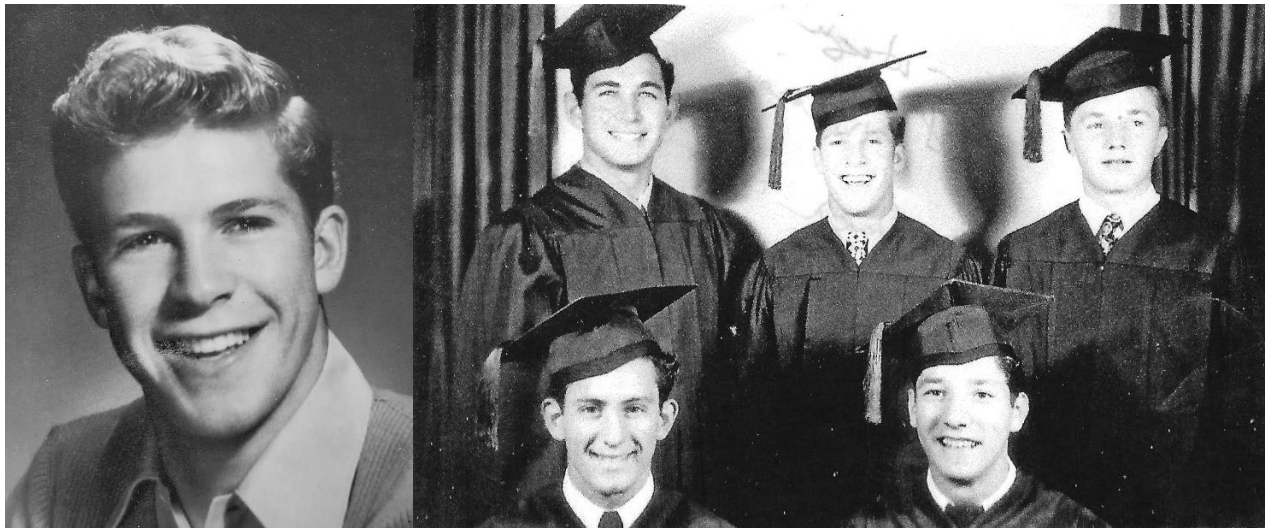
Peter was greatly influenced by his father and grandfather--both strong, intelligent, principled and successful businessmen--who instilled in him honesty, integrity, hard work, commitment and respect for his fellow man. He learned the values of responsibility and accountability for one's conduct and the rewards for a determined pursuit of one's vision of life. No

stranger to hard work, as a young man Peter held many jobs--janitor, newspaper carrier, painter and laborer—all of which reflect his strong work ethic.

Peter firmly believes that we all have a duty and responsibility to live up to our potential and that it is not the goal of life to be the best, but rather that we do our best to fulfill our individual capacity. In addition to what his father and grandfather taught him by example, Peter possesses the qualities of loyalty, fairness, understanding and generosity. While he can be tough when required, he also understands the value of compassion and compromise. He is strong willed,

dedicated, good natured and always ready to help a friend or someone in need with a smile on his face.

After earning his high school diploma in 1947, Peter attended the University of Santa Clara and graduated cum laude in 1951 with a Bachelor of Science degree.



**Monterey graduation photos, 1947. Back row L-R: Vic Ferrante, Peter and Lou Rudolph.
Front row L-R: Sal Colleto and Frank Flores.**

In June of 1952 Peter married Catherine “Rena” Russo in a large wedding that was one of the social events of the year. Rena was from a large well-known family in the community. Peter and Rena met at San Carlos Grammar School and were classmates at Monterey High School where they dated sporadically. After graduating from high school Peter attended Santa Clara University and it was quite a while before they met again. In his sophomore year at Santa Clara they reacquainted at a holiday party. The romance began to bloom and on subsequent trips home they dated and within a year they were engaged.

Peter then entered law school at Boalt Hall at the University of California in Berkeley. At that time the Korean War was going on, so Peter took a leave of

absence and enlisted in the United States Air Force. After completing basic training and attending intelligence school, where he completed the course as number one academically, he was selected to attend Officer Candidate School (OCS). Chosen as the flight captain by his fellow cadets, he led his flight unit until he graduated and was commissioned as a second lieutenant in March of 1953. He earned the recognition of Distinguished Graduate.



USAF March 1953 San Antonio, Texas.

After release from active duty, Peter returned to law school at the University of San Francisco School, graduating in 1956 as first in his class and recipient of the Faculty Award, the highest academic honor given by the law school. He passed the bar exam and was sworn in as an attorney of law in December of 1956. After practicing in the San Francisco Bay Area for one year, Peter, with Rena and their two daughters, Mary Sue and Regina, returned to Monterey and joined the firm of Hudson, Martin, Ferrante and Street in 1958. He was made a partner in 1960 and was the managing partner for over 45 years until his retirement.



Shrine in memory of Catherine "Rena" Coniglio, commemorating the 50th anniversary of her death. Alyson, Michele, Mary Sue, Peter, Regina, Juliana and Kimberly.

Three more daughters-- Kimberly, Michele and Juliana--were born to Peter and Rena over the next years in Monterey, but sadly in 1967 Peter lost his beloved wife to breast cancer. In Rena's honor and memory Peter built the shrine of Our Lady of Bethlehem on the grounds of the San Carlos

Catholic Cathedral in Monterey. The original statue of Our Lady of Bethlehem is located at the Carmel Mission above Father Junipero Serra's grave. To create the shrine Peter sent a photograph of the original statue to Carrara, Italy, and commissioned a copy carved from the marble quarries there. This shrine was rededicated in August 2017, commemorating the 50th anniversary of Rena's death. The ceremony was officiated by the Most Reverend Richard Garcia, then bishop of the Monterey Catholic Diocese and attended by the pastor of the church, Reverend Peter Crivello, the vice-vicar of the Monterey Diocese and former pastor of San Carlos Cathedral. The shrine is still on the grounds of the cathedral.

Several years after Rena's death, Peter married Patricia Sherlock and welcomed his sixth daughter, Alyson. After 15 years the marriage ended, but Peter and Pat have remained good friends.

Peter and his wife Rochelle have been together for over 40 years; they reside in Carmel Valley. Together they have traveled the world--Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Sicily, China and Israel, just to name a few countries. They went on a three-week African safari in Kenya and Tanzania and have been to Mexico, Costa Rica, Canada, Alaska and through the Panama Canal. They also traveled extensively throughout the United States. During one very memorable trip in 2009, Peter and Rochelle attended the Kentucky Derby as guests of close friends. Peter, who didn't know much about horses or gambling, put \$20 on five different entries with odds at 50 to 1. One of those horses won, and the race paid Peter \$1,400.

Peter has always been a strong family man and very close to his daughters. The family went on many memorable and enjoyable vacations and trips. One regular outing was to San Francisco to see Broadway musicals. In 2002 Peter took his daughters and Rochelle on a winter trip to New York City, where they shopped, attended the theater and dined at world-famous restaurants. The excitement of

The Big Apple at Christmas time was thrilling, and the trip is still fondly remembered by all of them.



New York City, The Big Apple, at Christmas, 2002.

Peter had a very close relationship to his two brothers, Philip and John, both of whom are deceased. The three were united in family matters and in business and investments. Together they owned and developed a number of commercial buildings and properties in Monterey, Seaside, Carmel, Carmel Valley and Fresno, as well as being partners in the Monterey Marriott Hotel and the Cannery Row Company. When Nick Lombardo built the Rancho Canada Golf Courses in Carmel Valley, Peter and his brothers were partners in the venture.

Peter counts as his family not only his wife and daughters plus 14 grandchildren, but also sons-in-law, in-laws, nieces and nephews. After his brothers' deaths, Peter continued his warm ties with their respective families. Love and respect for family was instilled in Peter by his parents, and these qualities are found extensively

throughout the whole Coniglio family. Peter often says that the most important things in life are health and family.

Peter's love for the City of Monterey--its history, natural beauty and outstanding people--is reflected in his legacy of service and contributions to the community. Much of his time and energy has been spent through the years on numerous governing boards, civil and charitable organizations, such as the Monterey Bay Aquarium, Community Hospital of the Monterey Peninsula, Monterey Community Foundation, AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am Golf Tournament, University of Santa Clara Board of Regents, Monterey Commercial Properties Association as a co-founder and past president, Monterey History and Art Association, American Cancer Society, Asilomar Board of Trustees, Monterey Hospice of the Central Coast, Monterey County Bar Association and Foundation as an officer and past president, Monterey Museum of Art, Family Resource Center of Monterey, Colonial Foundation, Monterey Peninsula College Foundation, Eskaton Board of Trustees as president of the board, Board of Junipero High School, Monterey Conference Center Art Commission of which he was the founder and chairman, Monterey Special Health Initiative Authority, Natividad Hospital Fundraising Agency and the Italian Heritage Society. Peter was also one of the founders of Monterey County Bank and still sits on its board of directors.

Peter has had memberships in a number of clubs and organizations, including the Monterey Kiwanis, Elks, Knights of Columbus, Sons of Italy, Paisano Club, Italian Heritage Society, Pacheco Club and the Compari Club, of which he was one of the founders and past presidents.

Peter took part in many fundraising drives, including those for a new Catholic high school; construction of the San Carlos Cathedral parish hall; the American Cancer Society; the purchase of furniture, fixtures and equipment for the Monterey Sports Center, and the State Theater Preservation Group. He conceived and implemented the construction of the historic tile mosaic on the outside wall of the Monterey

Conference Center and helped raise the funds for it. He also initiated and helped raise the funds for the dolphin sculpture executed by artist Emil Norman, which is located inside the Monterey Conference Center. Peter was instrumental in the creation of the original, official flag of the City of Monterey, which was designed by a California historian and presented to the city at the opening of the Monterey Conference Center in 1977.

Peter's efforts have not been limited to benefiting only the Monterey Peninsula area. In January 1968 there was a severe earthquake in Sicily in the area where many folks among Monterey's Sicilian colony had originated or had family. Peter, together with then-mayor Shedo "Buck" Russo, led a drive to raise funds for the victims, and a substantial amount of money was raised. To be certain the funds reached the victims, Peter decided to take the money to Sicily himself. Peter's brother Philip, his cousin Robert Crivello and good friend Salvatore Cerrito, a local businessman and restaurateur, volunteered to join Peter, and they all traveled to Sicily at their own expense. Peter had arranged through the U.S. State Department to meet the American consul in Palermo, and the group toured the devastated area where people who had lost their homes were living in tents. The men witnessed firsthand the terrible damage and suffering. They also had lunch with *il prefetto*, or governor, of the area where the earthquake had occurred. The governor wanted Peter to leave the funds with him; but Peter elected instead to bring them back with him to Monterey, because he was uncertain how they would be distributed. When the situation was more stable, Peter sent the funds to the American Consulate in Palermo, which oversaw their use in construction of a dormitory at an orphanage destroyed by the earthquake.

Peter raised funds for a memorial honoring Father Juan Oronoz, who was the chaplain at the Carmelite Monastery for 30 years. Peter had a close relationship with him. A tile mosaic of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Father Juan's patron saint, was installed on the north wall of the monastery in front of the rose garden and now stands as a perpetual remembrance of Father Juan.

In early 1966 with the valuable assistance of Phil Anastasi, prominent businessman on Fisherman's Wharf and leader of the concessioners on the wharf, Peter formed the Fisherman's Wharf Association, which consisted of the wharf concessioners and property owners, and he negotiated the first long-term wharf leases with the City of Monterey. Peter also successfully proposed that the City of Monterey dedicate the boat harbor to former mayor Shedo "Buck" Russo, who played an important role in the funding for the Monterey Harbor.

In 1970 when the City of Monterey celebrated its centennial year, the various ethnic groups of the city were each assigned one week to celebrate their respective heritage and cultures. Peter, as a member of the Monterey City Council, was asked to be chairman of Italian Week. In 1975 he put together a group of prominent Italians and formed the Italian Heritage Society and was elected its first president. The Italian Heritage Society is an organization that was founded by a group of Monterey residents whose forefathers and families were the fishermen who built the sardine fishing and canning industry of Monterey. They were primarily of Sicilian origin. Under Peter's leadership the IHS resurrected the Santa Rosalia Festival, which had been started by Peter's grandmother Rosa Ferrante and two of her dear friends, Mrs. Giamona and Mrs. Balbo--all of whom were respected members of the Sicilian community. The original festival occurred in the early 1930s, and today it continues as an important, successful and well-appreciated activity for the city. In 1997 the Festa Italia Santa Rosalia Foundation was formed, and they took over the putting on of the Festa Italia under the capable leadership of Buster Crivello. Each year the Italian Heritage Society holds an Honoree Dinner to acknowledge Italian Americans who have given back to the community, making the Monterey Peninsula a great place to live. Peter was a well-deserved Italian Heritage Society Honoree in 2002. Spearheaded by the IHS President Annamarie Della Sala-Stanton, the Italian Heritage Society has published two editions of *Italian Fishing Families of Monterey*, preserving stories from the sardine-fishing era, and is currently collecting stories for a third book, *Italian Americans: "We Don't Just Fish!"*

Peter was devoted to his city and served it in many capacities. He started his public career as a member of the Monterey Parks and Recreation Commission. While on the commission, on his own initiative he negotiated an effort to buy the Del Monte Golf Course from the Del Monte Company, now the Pebble Beach Company. The company offered to sell the course to the city for \$400,000; but unfortunately, the city fathers felt that they could not afford it and the purchase did not come to fruition.



**Mayor of Monterey, 1st. term
April 1973.**

Peter went on to serve on the City Planning Commission for seven years, as chairman for five years. Subsequently he was elected to the City Council and served as a councilman for six years. In 1973 Peter was elected mayor of Monterey and re-elected in 1975 for a second term. As mayor he faced the divisive issues of urban renewal, which had stymied the city for over 16 years. Determined to solve the problems and restore economic vitality for the future of the city, Peter led the fight to build the Monterey Conference Center. Against strong local opposition, and opposition from the California Coastal Commission and National Historic Preservation Commission, located in Washington D.C., the city finally succeeded in securing approval for the conference center, which was seen as a key factor in urban renewal. In the negotiations, however, plans for a performing arts theater, which had been part of the original design, had to be tabled. The Monterey Conference Center was built under Peter's leadership and opened in April 1977, dedicated by Mayor Coniglio in his last official act before leaving office.

In the early 1970s during Peter's term as mayor, the City of Monterey was placed on water rationing, which was a difficult burden for all its residents. There existed no agency--federal, state or local--possessing jurisdiction over management of water resources that could assist in the solution of the water issues faced by the city and

entire peninsula area. Peter decided that something had to be done to resolve the problem, so he contacted Sam Farr, who was a Monterey County supervisor, and together they secured the assistance of Henry Mello, the peninsula's assemblyman in Sacramento. Peter also sought the guidance and expertise of William Gianelli, the water czar for the State of California under Governor Ronald Reagan and who was retired and living in Pebble Beach. Mr. Gianelli agreed to come on board, and this team, through the legislative council in Sacramento, proposed the creation of a special district to manage the water resources of the Monterey Peninsula. Peter held three separate public hearings in Monterey, Pacific Grove and Carmel to introduce the legislation and explain what was being proposed. After a positive response from the community, the legislation was finalized, voted on and passed into law. This was the beginning of the Monterey Water Management Agency, which still exists. Originally the main purpose in forming this agency was to build a new dam on the Carmel River large enough to capture surplus water during the good (wet) winters so it would be available during the drought years. Construction of the new dam required a vote of the people and unfortunately was rejected.

Peter has been recognized by a number of organizations for his civic, business and charitable contributions to the community. They include the United States Senate, United States House of Representatives, State of California Senate and Assembly, California Supreme Court, University of Santa Clara Board of Regents, University of San Francisco School of Law, California State Parks and Recreation Commission, Monterey History and Art Association, City of Monterey First Night, Monterey County Bar Association and the Italian Heritage Society.

In 1978 he was honored by the president of Italy, who bestowed on him the title of *il Commendatore*, an Italian honorary order of chivalry. That same year he received the Citizen of the Year Award from the Monterey Chamber of Commerce, In addition, the Monterey County Bar Association awarded him the Gibson Award for outstanding community service.

He has also received the Junior Achievement Award.

In 2016 Peter received a special award from the Monterey History and Art Association for his services as chairman of the La Merienda barbeque committee for 45 years. The same association also recognized him with the Laura Powers Award, given each year to a citizen of distinction for community service. The Monterey Kiwanis Club awarded Peter the Paul Harris Fellowship Award in 2007.



Citizen of the year award dinner.

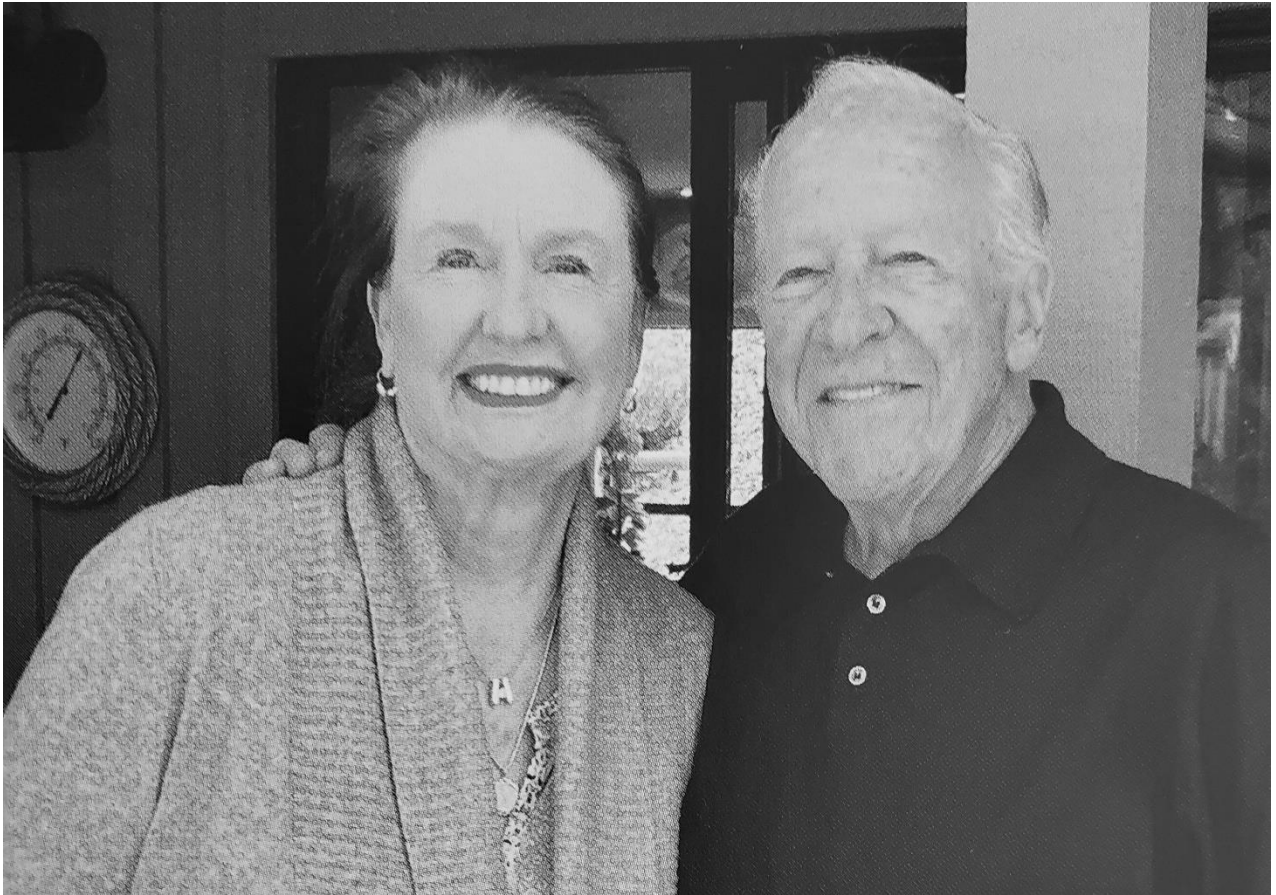


Family celebrating Peter's 90th birthday.

Peter has led a very happy and productive life; he is a man who always saw and focused on the positive aspects of life and overcame tragedies and setbacks with optimism and gratitude for the blessings he had. The successes and failures of his life formed the foundation of his beliefs and motivations for his efforts and philosophy. He has always endeavored to make a productive contribution to his

faith, his family and his community and hopes to be remembered as a good and decent human being. Peter has a great zest for life and cherishes his family and friendships. Of all his achievements, recognitions and honors Peter is proudest of

his wonderful, close and loving family. His immediate and extended family has always been his greatest source of pride. He is profoundly grateful for their love and encouragement as he journeys through life.



Peter and wife Rochelle, Easter 2021.

ITALIAN HERITAGE SOCIETY HONOREE 2002