

Barnett's meticulous work served public well

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In his 22 years on the Yakima City Council, Clarence Barnett's quiet mastery of budget and water issues won the respect of voters, colleagues and state officials. He gleaned that knowledge from his methodical research of an issue, which allowed him to ask the right questions and arrive at the right decisions.

Barnett, who died Friday at age 93, was a Yakima Valley native born into a longtime Yakima family. His father, Dolph Barnett, was the longest-serving Superior Court judge in Yakima County history. Like many men of his era, Clarence Barnett went into the military, but he took it much further. He served 28 years in the Army, including stints in World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War. He retired as a lieutenant colonel and with a passion for recognizing the sacrifices of America's military personnel.

Clarence's brother, Dolph Barnett Jr., died in the Philippines during World War II. Clarence Barnett, with the help of the late state Sen. Alex Deccio, honored his brother's memory by advocating for a new National Guard armory that bears Dolph Jr.'s name.

Clarence Barnett first came to the council by appointment in 1981, and the voters and his colleagues soon recognized his skills; he was elected to the council five times — without opposition in 1999 — and to the largely ceremonial mayor's post in 1984-86. Some of his most valuable work came in dealing with state government.

In the 1990s, pollution issues in the Puget Sound area prompted the state to implement more stringent stormwater management policies. Barnett argued for measures that took into account this area's arid climate and runoff patterns, which differ from those on the rainy west side. His preparation and attention to detail won over officials with the state Department of Ecology, and his advocacy helped reduce impediments to development in the ensuing years.

He also worked to improve the capacity and reliability of the city's irrigation system, along with shepherding the new police station and expansion of the Yakima Convention Center — all while keeping a sharp eye on how the city was spending its dollars. His departure from the council in 2003

was voluntary — he filed for re-election, then stepped aside when he saw an array of candidates seeking his seat. He endorsed Dave Edler, who would go on to win that election; Edler credits Barnett with helping him master the learning curve of council issues.

Over his two-plus decades in elected office, Barnett showed how government can serve the populace without getting in the way of economic growth. Those looking for a model of public service can start with Clarence Barnett.



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