

Manhattan Project physicist Ralph Nobles dies at 94

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(AP)—Ralph Nobles, a nuclear physicist who worked on the Manhattan Project and later led efforts to save thousands of acres of San Francisco Bay wetlands from development, died following complications of pneumonia, according to his daughter. He was 94.

A Redwood City resident for half a century, Nobles died Friday at Kaiser Permanente Redwood City Medical Center, the San Jose Mercury News reported (bayareane.ws/17wuOjP).

"I think he'd like to be remembered as a devoted husband and loving father, but also as somebody who participated in life," said Nobles' daughter, Elizabeth Nobles Cozart, of Redwood City. "He traveled all over the world. He fought for the environment and for people, and he helped the country win World War II. He touched so many lives."

Born on a farm in Dexter, Missouri, in 1920, Nobles was a standout student who would eventually earn a PhD in physics. He and his brother were chosen to work on the Manhattan Project and the two moved to Los Alamos, New Mexico, where Robert Oppenheimer and other leading scientists of the 20th century built the world's first atomic bomb in concert with Enrico Fermi, Edward Teller and other researchers.

"From the standpoint of sheer drama, tension and excitement, nothing else in my life has equaled, or even come close to that night at Trinity," he wrote in 2008 about observing the first nuclear blast. "When, for better or for worse, we let the nuclear weapons 'genie' out of its bottle

and initiated a chain of events that precipitated an abrupt ending of World War II."

From the early 1960s until the 1990s, Nobles worked at the Palo Alto research laboratories of Lockheed Missiles and Space. He served as chairman of the Redwood City Planning Commission and was heavily involved in issues from civil rights to preserving the environment.

In 1981, Nobles and his wife sprang into action when Redwood City Council approved a development project on Bair Island, a 3,000-acre wetlands just north of the port of Redwood City. Nobles and his allies formed "Friends of Redwood City," collected signatures, and put the project on the ballot, where it was defeated by 47 votes in 1982.

In 2004, Nobles similarly led a fight to block plans by another developer to build a \$1 billion complex of 17 condominium towers next to the property. Redwood City voters rejected it, too.

"Ralph always had a big smile. He was very handsome like Clark Gable. But he did give a damn," said Florence LaRiviere, a longtime Palo Alto environmentalist, recalling a former national wildlife refuge manager's quip about him.

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