

# San Lorenzo Valley activist, quadrapalegic dies at 64

By **KURTIS ALEXANDER**

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John Joseph Crosson, a San Lorenzo Valley resident who refused to let a debilitating car accident undermine a calling to politics, died Saturday. He was 65.

He contracted an infection during one of his increasingly regular stays at the Palo Alto Veterans Hospital.

For 44 years, Crosson lived with the effects of a spinal cord injury suffered while on leave from the U.S. Navy. The accident left him with three of four limbs paralyzed and confined to a wheelchair but not without his zest for life, say friends and family.

"Maybe he couldn't get out of his chair and walk, but anything that John really wanted to accomplish, he accomplished," said longtime friend Les Gardener.

Most knew Crosson for his pursuit of politics. Friends say it may have been inspired by his empathy for disabled veterans but quickly evolved into a broader push to improve the circumstances of the less fortunate and underrepresented.

"He understood how much politics could affect our daily lives," Gardener said.

After moving to the county in 1975, Crosson immersed himself in the environmental movement of the San Lorenzo Valley and the efforts of the local Democratic club. He was working as chair of the county's Democratic Party by the time the election of President Bill Clinton came around. And Crosson would serve repeatedly as a delegate to the state Democratic convention.

"I'm not a one-issue person just working on disabilities," he told the



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**John Crosson meets with President Bill Clinton.**

Sentinel in 1989. "What goes with me to these meetings is not just my disabled issues but my North County Democratic issues."

Crosson was inseparable from his wife, Deloris, a nurse at a San Jose hospital who cared for him when his family moved him from the East Coast. As diplomatic and mild-mannered as Crosson was, Deloris is equally gregarious and spontaneous, friends say.

"The two of them working together was a wonderful thing," said former state Assemblyman John Laird. "They used to have big events at their house. I remember everybody doing the Macarena in their backyard in Felton."

The couple's renown went beyond local political circles. They were regulars at San Jose Sharks hockey games and frequented the watering holes of the San Lorenzo Valley.

"They'd go out at night and enliven any place they'd show up at," said

## JOHN JOSEPH CROSSON

**BORN:** Nov. 28, 1943

**DIED:** March 28, 2009

**HOME:** Felton

**OCCUPATION:** Political activist

**EDUCATION:** Degrees from Girard College in Philadelphia, UC Santa Cruz, San Jose State University

**COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT:** County Commission on Disabilities, North County Democratic Club of Santa Cruz, Santa Cruz County Democratic Party, volunteer with Valley Churches United Missions

**SURVIVORS:** Wife Deloris, daughter Robin Vozzolo and her husband Ken

**SERVICES:** Memorial service 1 p.m. May 2 at In Vino Veritas, Scotts Valley. The family suggests donations be made to Valley Churches United Missions, 9400 Highway 9, Ben Lomond, 95005.

Jon Backstrom, a longtime friend.

A native of New Jersey, Crosson earned his degree at Girard College in Philadelphia. He joined the Navy in 1963 and worked for two years on a submarine before his car accident. He would later earn additional degrees at UC Santa Cruz and San Jose State University.

Though Crosson's health had deteriorated in recent years, friends say just knowing he was available to listen meant so much.

"You always felt like you could call him for advice and common sense," said Backstrom. "He'll be missed now."