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Residents shocked at the death of mayor

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VALDOSTA, Ga. — Although considered diminutive in stature, James Rainwater cast a big shadow in Valdosta.

Rainwater, 62, who had been mayor since 1988, died Oct. 12 after complaining of chest pains at his home.

His constituents say his booming voice and trademark cowboy boots were easily recognizable in Valdosta, as he completed his 16th year as mayor. Known as a mayor who got things done, he also was one of the premier boosters of Moody Air Force Base.

On Oct. 12, he had completed his daily five-mile walk and was talking on the telephone to a friend when he complained of chest pains and the phone went silent. The friend called 911, but Rainwater died later at South Georgia Medical Center.

People in the community were shocked at his death. Rainwater is credited with leading Valdosta through difficult times.

He began civic service as a councilman in 1986 and was elected mayor two years later.

Under his leadership, a number of problems were overcome, including poor-quality drinking water, slow growth of industry and low morale of city workers, according to The Valdosta Daily Times.

Rainwater was in the middle of a re-election campaign, facing two opponents, but was expected to win, local sources said.

City officials and friends expressed shock at the mayor's death.

City Manager Larry Hanson worked closely with the mayor.

"Mayor Rainwater dedicated his life to serving people. He truly served all the people of this city," Hanson said.

In other accomplishments, Rainwater was instrumental in the accreditation process for the police department and building the fire department's ranking as one of the best in the state. He also played a big part in the creation of a state-of-the-art water treatment facility.

Rainwater owned a local insurance agency, which he opened in 1979.

He served on Georgia Municipal Association's Board of Directors and was former chairman.

He was appointed by former Gov. Zell Miller to Governor's Employment and Training Council and was appointed by former Gov. Roy Barnes in 2000 to the Military Affairs Committee.



As the longest-serving mayor of Valdosta, Rainwater had a special feeling for the office.

In one of his interviews with the Valdosta newspaper, Rainwater said: "The position of mayor is a position of leadership. The mayor is the representative, no matter where he is, of the people of Valdosta. When you go to meetings, when you meet with other state officials, they look to the mayor as the leadership of the community."

As Andy Deal, chairman of the Valdosta Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors, put it: "There are a big set of boots to fill."

