



Bernard Apodaca

May 20, 1942 - June 22, 2015

Longtime Fort Collins resident and humanitarian Bernard “Barney” DeHerrera Apodaca died of complications from pneumonia on Monday, June 22, 2015, in the Pathways Hospice Care Center at McKee Medical Center in Loveland. He was 73.

Known as The Angel of Old Town, Barney was beloved throughout the downtown community and beyond, widely known for his ready smile, his enthusiastic high-fives, his dancing at the city’s numerous summer festivals, his “Hello, my friend!” and his tireless efforts, while walking the city’s streets, to raise funds for a plethora of nonprofit causes: Muscular Dystrophy Association (MDA) and its Jerry Lewis Telethon, Junior Achievement, AIDS Walk Colorado, Northern Colorado Youth Hockey, the Multiple Sclerosis Bike Tour, the American Cancer Society, and Poudre Valley Hospital. An avid bowler, Barney also raised money for a variety of agencies serving people with special needs at numerous bowl-a-thons and other events. Barney also raised \$2,300 for a gymnasium at the Youth Activity Center.

In recognition, President George W. Bush signed H.R. 5308 on November 6, 2002, which named the U.S. Post Office at 301 South Howes Street the Barney Apodaca Post Office Building. In respect for Barney’s wishes, no sign appears there to announce the honor. Barney was also a recipient of a “9Cares Colorado Shares Award” from KUSA-TV, as well as special recognition from Jerry Lewis for his work on behalf of Jerry’s Kids and MDA. When asked once which charity he favored, Barney replied, “All of them.”

Barney’s honors also include more than 30 medals for outstanding track and field performance from the Special Olympics, where he competed starting in 1974; an Employee Achievement Award from the Aggie Theatre; and service as Grand Marshall of local parades such as the St. Patrick’s Day celebration.

Other monikers depicting Barney’s warmth and community spirit were “Mayor of Old Town” and “Ambassador of Friendship.” In just 12 hours after Barney’s stay in hospice was announced, friends from near and far posted hundreds of tributes on social media. Quite a

few were from adults looking back on how Barney had affected them in their childhood. One wrote of how she'd been an awkward preteen, but Barney gave her confidence in herself: "You always made me feel happy and good." Another wrote, "The world was a better, kinder place with you in it to cheer us up as kids when school wasn't going well or a boy was being mean, or to talk us out of doing something we knew we shouldn't."

Another online tribute reads, "Barney was a Fort Collins treasure. He spread joy wherever he went. If there was a cause to work for or a good deed that needed to be done, he was the guy to do it." Others wrote: "He brought a smile everywhere he went." "There were no strangers in his world. He was truly a friend to everyone he met!" "Your passion for life was contagious." "No one could encounter Barney and not have their day elevated."

Barney was born in Walsenburg, Colorado on May 20, 1942. His parents were unable to care for him, and the late Emma Valdez, a nurse and midwife, was the first to take him in, for temporary care. Her daughter, Dorothy Martinez, became Barney's godmother. In autumn of that year county officials took Barney to the Colorado State Children's Home in Pueblo. He would live in several state facilities, and as a young adult was placed with Pueblo Diversified Industries, which offered training in job and life skills.

In 1971 with the movement to deinstitutionalize people with disabilities, Barney moved to group homes in Fort Collins. In 1972 he became one of the first clients of the newly established nonprofit serving individuals with cognitive disabilities, now named Foothills Gateway, Inc. Over the years Gateway staff would assist Barney with grocery shopping, bookkeeping, and medical issues, but Barney would live in his own apartment and find his own jobs, most often holding down at least two part-time jobs when he wasn't greeting people in Old Town on his walks.

Barney delivered newspapers for the Triangle Review and was a janitor for many years at the Aggie Theatre on College Avenue. He began working maintenance jobs in the Recreation Department of the City of Fort Collins in 1994, serving at the Edora Pool Ice Center (EPIC), the Mulberry Pool, and Northside Aztlan Community Center. Barney would go on to serve 18 years with the City, until 2012.

Barney was a longtime and beloved parishioner at Saint Joseph Catholic Church on Mountain Avenue in Old Town.

The eldest of eleven children, Barney would not meet his brothers and sisters until he was 63. His friend Gary Lopez was taking him to the State Fair in Pueblo a couple of years earlier and swung by Walsenburg, where Barney had been born. Barney was heartbroken

that the family's house was no longer there. So over several years, with help from local genealogy buffs, Gary searched high and low until he finally found Barney's brother Phil in Walsenburg. It turned out that Phil's son had been doing some research, too, but hadn't yet found Barney. The family had a grand reunion at the Vail Hotel in Pueblo on January 2, 2005, which was reported in *The Pueblo Chieftain* and the *Fort Collins Coloradoan*. The family has met numerous times since then in both Pueblo and Fort Collins, and many were able to be with Barney at hospice.

Several years later Barney's physical and emotional health began to decline, and he moved into assisted living at Garden Square on Spring Creek in 2010. His caregivers were so fond of him that several of them continued serving intermittently as respite care, once he moved into the Loveland host home of Brecken and Levi Fenwick. Mindful of how Barney had spent almost three decades in institutional living at the start of his life, his friend and stalwart guardian Kate Kosakowki had been looking for a home setting for his care and found the Fenwicks in October 2013. The Fenwicks worked tirelessly to address Barney's health needs and foster his happiness. His last 21 months were filled with laughter, children, camping and road trips—including to Red Feather Lakes and the Gulf Coast—and with love.

Barney was preceded in death by his mother, Margaret Apodaca, his father, Joseph DeHerrera, both of Walsenburg; his brothers Joseph Filbert "Phil" DeHerrera of Walsenburg and Epifanio DeHerrera of Pueblo; and his sisters Lucy Archuleta and Rose DeHerrera, both of Pueblo. He is survived by his siblings Vera Johnson, Dora DeHerrera, Teresa Sena, Frances DeHerrera, John DeHerrera, and Carol DeHerrera, all of Pueblo; by numerous nieces, nephews, grandnieces, and grandnephews; by his godmother Dorothy Martinez of Walsenburg; by Kate Kosakowski of Fort Collins; by Loveland residents Brecken and Levi Fenwick, their children Mylie and Jaycee, and friend Jimmy—whom Barney called his foster family; and by all who frequented Old Town during Barney's years, especially the children.

A gathering for the family and the community will be held at Library Park, 201 Peterson Street (north side along Oak Street), Fort Collins, on Saturday, June 27, with memorial services from 5:00 to 6:00 p.m. and a celebration of Barney's life, with tributes and his favorite music, from 6:00 to 8:00. Please bring chairs or blankets and a picnic dinner; food and drink will not be served.

A funeral will be held later this year at Saint Mary Catholic Church in Walsenburg, with interment following at the cemetery in Aguilar, Colorado.

In lieu of flowers, donations are being accepted for the “Barney Apodaca Memorial Fund,” which will be devoted to the Celebration of Life at Library Park and to creating a physical memorial to Barney, so that our community will remember and celebrate him throughout the decades to come. Contributions may be made in person at any Colorado branch of FirstBank, or checks may be mailed to FirstBank Old Town, 100 South College Avenue, Fort Collins, CO 80524.

We encourage all in Barney’s beloved community to post memories and photos on the “Barney Apodaca” page on Facebook and to enjoy the recollections of others there.

Events

JUN **Celebration of Life** 05:00PM - 08:00PM

27

Library Park

Oldtown, Fort Collins, CO, US

Comments



“ Oh Barney, I was unaware that you had passed away. I met you years ago when I worked at Woolworth. You were so friendly, kind, and free-spirited. You didn't have a mean bone in your body and you were always so kind to everyone. Thank you, Barney, for bringing that ray of sunshine to us, you are missed! Rest in peace, my friend.

Chris - February 25, 2018 at 11:18 PM



“ Barney was the epitome of positive. He could always make someone smile. Becky Hauser

becky hauser - July 05, 2015 at 11:27 PM



“ Barney - Thanks for everything! Love, Kacy

Kacy Thompson - June 27, 2015 at 03:29 PM



“ The Thursday night concerts down town were not the same when Barney could no longer attend. He added such sunshine to the event. He had such a kind heart and beautiful smile. Rest in peace you special little man we will all miss you.

Shirley Cressler

Shirley Cressler - June 27, 2015 at 12:47 PM



“ Barney would also come into my store (Life of the Party) in old town and ask me to get him CDs of the 50's (his favorite) and would always pay up front. I was more than glad to do this for him.

He was an inspiration to many people in old town and will be missed sorely.

Pat Talley

Pat Talley - June 27, 2015 at 10:14 AM



“ As a business owner in Old Town from 1993-2006, I got to know Barney pretty well. His friendly nature was always a highlight and his dear spirit will be missed!

Ann Beck

Ann Beck - June 24, 2015 at 10:05 PM



“ I was always running into Barney in Old Town Fort Collins, and stopping to talk to him. He was a fixture here - part of Fort Collins and the charm of living in a small town. He will be missed. I'll always see him smiling, and wearing a baseball cap. RIP Barney!

Nora Su Alvarado - June 24, 2015 at 01:15 PM



“ We lived on Mountain Avenue for a number of years when our children were born and for their elementary school years. In those days Barney would see Barney regularly in the neighborhood and in Old Town.

In addition to visiting with Barney about his many fund raisers and community efforts - I can't hear someone say "Jerry's Kinds" without thinking about Barney - he was always concerned with how our children were doing. They were happy health kids and they always had Uncle Barney checking in on them to make sure they were doing well. One day he even brought a stuffed animal gift for them.

Knowing Barney and having him in our lives was a precious gift, not just to me and my family, but to the entire community, Dennis Sumner

Dennis Sumner - June 24, 2015 at 12:13 PM



“ Many, many years ago, on my first visit to Old Town for the Thursday night summer concert series on the plaza, Barney sat next to me. He introduced himself, shook my hand. I thought he had the softest hands! I figured with nice hands and such a lovely smile, this had to be a really great person! Like so many others, I'll remember him with the ball cap on his head, grin on his face and working the crowd in Old Town!

Lauri Gail - June 24, 2015 at 09:37 AM



“ Exactly!!

Nora Su Alvarado - June 24, 2015 at 01:16 PM



“ Today Barney wakes up kissing the face of God and holding Mother Mary's hand! What a gift Barney was! My son Chas was blessed to work with Barney and all of the Special Olympians in basketball and softball. Meadowlark Lemon had nothing on Barney with the half court hook shot. Barney's spirit will always be a part of Old Town Fort Collins, Rest in peace dear Friend.

CLR

CL Robles - June 24, 2015 at 09:16 AM



“ My thoughts and prayers go out to Barney's family and friends. Barney was a very special person who was a joy to be around. He always had a smile on his face. Barney loved to tell us his favorite numbers he played on the lottery. Always the same ones. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6. He was sure that there were the winning numbers. Barney will be greatly missed.

CS

CS - June 23, 2015 at 04:34 PM