



News from

Council President Todd Gloria

City of San Diego ▪ District Three

NEWS RELEASE

For immediate release: August 19, 2013

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Remembering Jose Julio Sarria, 1922 – 2013

Sarria was the First Openly Gay Candidate for Elected Office in North America

SAN DIEGO, CA (August 19, 2013) – Council President Todd Gloria today offered the following statement upon the passing of Jose Julio Sarria, the first openly gay candidate to run for elected office in North America. Sarria ran for the San Francisco Board of Supervisors in 1961. He was also World War II veteran.

“The fact that the sexual orientation of candidates is no longer considered a barrier to election in San Diego is due to the brave steps Mr. Sarria took for us all 50 years ago,” said Council President Todd Gloria. **“I am grateful to Mr. Sarria for paving the way for me and many others to serve the public as elected representatives. We must acknowledge the importance of his candidacy in San Francisco in 1961, Harvey Milk’s later successful election there, and Chris Kehoe’s winning bid in San Diego in 1993 as critical points in our path toward full representation and full equality.”**

Sarria was born in San Francisco, California on December 22, 1922 as the only child of Maria Delores Maldonado of Columbia and Julio Sarria of San Francisco. Upon his graduation from Commerce High School in San Francisco, he immediately enlisted in the U.S. Army during World War II, rising to the rank of Staff Sergeant prior to his discharge in 1945.

After his discharge from the Army, Sarria returned to San Francisco and was considered the most famous drag queen/female impersonator entertainer. Most notable were his one-person operas at the historic Black Cat Bar in the 1950s and 1960s. He declared himself “Empress Jose I, The Widow Norton” after winning a drag queen competition at the Tavern Guild’s “Beaux Arts Ball” in 1965. With that proclamation, the first Court Chapter of the International Court System was established. The International Court System now has chapters in over 68 cities in North America, all of which focus on raising funds for community causes.

Sarria was 90 years old and passed away in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Memorial arrangements will be officially announced by the Imperial Court of San Francisco.

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