

Rucker's life lauded

Former police chief loved stories, cigars

By LOLITA HARPER, Staff Writer

SAN BERNARDINO - His full white beard. The twinkle in his eye. His animated stories. His trademark cigar. Raymond Rucker will be missed.

Hundreds packed into Bobbitt Memorial Chapel on Friday to bid a final farewell to the popular former police chief who made people believe in themselves and in others. The region's top law enforcement officials, including the current chief, Garrett Zimmon, and Sheriff Gary Penrod, also were there.

Rucker, whose health had been failing for the past few years, died Sunday. He was 83. The father, grandfather and great-grandfather left behind a legacy of good will, community service and loyalty, his loved ones said. Over the sound of heavy rain pelting the chapel rooftop, son Jerry Rucker revealed a secret his father took to his grave. Jerry had often asked his father why he gave so much of his time to charitable causes such as the Lighthouse for the Blind, Little League and the Elks. Ray Rucker answered with a story: When he was young, during the Great Depression, his mother would pack and deliver canned food to those who were less fortunate. One year, Rucker saw two men drop off a basket of food on his own front porch. It was then that he realized his family was also "less fortunate." "He vowed at that time that when he became able to, he would pay back that kindness," his son said. Jerry Rucker challenged those in attendance to follow in his father's footsteps and "help our fellow travelers on this trip through life." Former San Bernardino Mayor Tom Minor, also a retired police officer, said Rucker served as an excellent guide through a "very tough" time in law enforcement. Minor, who joined the Police Department in 1956, said his generation of officers had to keep the peace during a volatile time of civil unrest and riots.

Warren Cocke, who served as chief of police after Rucker retired in 1976, fondly recalled the time they spent on the force. "He was a great guy to work with," Cocke said, laughingly declining to publicly divulge their favorite adventures. He recalled Raymond as a long-winded story teller and a man who loved to tell jokes. "He would start to tell these stories in staff meetings and we would always laugh, no matter what," Cocke said. "We were never sure whether it was really a joke or a loyalty test." Things that Rucker implemented, like beat patrols, bike patrol, the use of dogs and scooter patrols are regarded now as innovative ideas. The concepts have been updated, with newer applications but the basic premise remains, Cocke said. "People think these things are new and innovative but they are really rehashed," he said. "We had them before. ... We keep seeing a regeneration of things that people forget were tried before."

Police Capt. Frank Mankin was hired by Rucker at the end of the chief's career. Rucker's career in law enforcement is unparalleled but he is best remembered in the Mankin household as Santa Claus. It was tradition for the 58-year San Bernardino resident to play Santa during the holiday season. "My kids grew up believing that Ray Rucker was Santa Claus," Mankin said.

Rucker was honored with a formal presentation by members of Elks Lodge 836, who confirmed his everlasting commitment to his brotherhood, family, country and God. He was said to be a true citizen, upholding the values and responsibilities of a faithful American and lending a helping hand to those in need.

Air Force personnel presented to the Rucker family an American flag in honor of his service to his country.

Attendees mourned Rucker's death with tears and celebrated his life with laughter. "I hope there is a cigar store in heaven," Jerry Rucker said.