

Respected union leader dies

O.D. Kenemore remembered as champion for workers.

By Michael Baker

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LAKE JACKSON — O.D. Kenemore, a trailblazer for workers' rights and longtime philanthropist in Brazoria County, died Monday after an illness. He was 77.

The business manager of Pipefitters Local 390 for almost 30 years, Kenemore had been inducted into the AFL-CIO Texas Labor Hall of Fame in 2002. He led the union from 1962 to 1990, including during the tumultuous 1972 strike at Dow Chemical Co. that resulted in a hiring plan for the pipefitters.

His fellow union members revere him to this day, said Jack Brown, the current business manager for the Pipefitters union. The union

named its union hall in honor of Kenemore a few years ago. That decision didn't come from a long-time member, which Brown said speaks volumes about the Kenemore's legacy.

"It wasn't someone from the top of the seniority," Brown said. "It was a newly installed member that made the motion."

The Texas-born Lake Jackson resident began his career in organized labor in 1950 when, working as a pipefitter in Port Arthur, he joined a local union. He became a member of Local 390 a year later when he moved to Clute.

His work for laborers extended outside of Brazoria County. Gov. Bill Clements appointed Kenemore to the Texas Worker's Compensation Commission in 1990.



Kenemore

During his nine years on the commission, he helped write rules concerning how to administer the Worker's Compensation Act.

But Kenemore also was well-known for his contributions outside of the labor community in the county, said Stephanie Cone, United Way of Brazoria County's executive director. The organization, of which Kenemore was a former board member, honored him in 2003 with its William D. Colegrove Award.

"His sense of urgency really helped invigorate the charities in our community," Cone said.

He helped establish the Brazoria County Youth Home in 1967, Cone said. He also was instrumental in opening the Texas Dow Employees Credit Union, and he served as the credit union's parliamentarian for 30 years, Cone said.

Kenemore also left his mark on county politics.

"He's Mr. Democrat in

these parts," said Tom Fowler, who served alongside Kenemore with the United Way. "He was very involved, right up to the end."

Even as the Democratic Party began to lose its grip on county politics, Kenemore stayed committed to keeping the party strong, Fowler said. A month to the day before his death, he attended a party meeting despite his rapidly weakening condition, Fowler said.

"He was a leader of leaders," Brown said. "He once said he would count his life a success if he made another life better because of something he did. If that's the way he evaluates life, we all know his life was a complete success."

Services for Kenemore are at 2 p.m. today at First Baptist Church of Clute. The Rev. Duane Phy and the Rev. Mark Cox will officiate.

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