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Paper

OBITUARY

Colorado agricultural and political icon dies at 64

By Natalie Munio**The Denver Post**

Those who worked most closely with former state Sen. Jim Isgar during his reign in Colorado's rural and agricultural industries herald him as a "Colorado treasure."

A native of Durango, the Democrat had a long-standing background in water conservation, which led in 2001 to a seat in the Senate, where he was re-elected to two more terms.

He later was appointed director of Rural Development for Colorado by President Barack Obama in 2009 — a role that would last him just four years.

Isgar was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia in 2011 and was forced to resign from the position for medical reasons in 2013.

He succumbed to his illness Friday in Denver, just two months shy of his 65th birthday.

He was surrounded by family.

"Jim was this very wise, very intelligent man. He had this understated but incredibly sharp wit. He knew so much about agriculture, politics, water, and how those things intersected in the West," said Trudy Kareus, longtime friend and Jim's successor as state director of rural development.

"He was this tall lanky guy with a lopsided grin and huge cowboy hat who just lightened up tense situations. He just made things better."

Bruce Whitehead, who filled Isgar's seat in the Senate in 2009, said Jim took on many different positions, but to him, played the role of friend and mentor best.

"When I joined the Senate, it was my first time in politics and I had a lot to learn. Jim was my sounding board on a number of issues," Whitehead said. "If he could help people, he would do whatever he could to bend over backwards and help anybody he could."

When his health issues kept him closer to home, Isgar began growing vegetables in his garden. His friends said it wasn't unusual to see him at the farmer's market selling his vegetables and spending time visiting with various people.

"We had a shared love of gardening — being on the ranch and watching things grow was his first love," said his widow, Brenda Isgar. "He loved to sit down at a meal and say, 'Wow, we raised every part of this ourselves,' and feel that gratification. He had a lot of time to do things he couldn't before in the last four years."

The two first met at Sunday school and later became high school sweethearts before losing touch and eventually marrying other people. After a reuniting some time later, they married in 1996.

"There's a foundation when you grow up with somebody, you really know who they are. We just picked up where we left off," Brenda Isgar said. "I really thought we'd grow old together."

Jim Isgar's sister, Joan Kellogg, describes her brother as a true Coloradan intent on helping a friend in need.

"Our running joke was that if we ever broke down on the side of a road, it wouldn't be less than a minute that someone would come by to help us because he knew everybody," Kellogg said. "When he met somebody, he really got to know them. He was so interested in the circumstances of other people."

His daughter Sarah Newton said there are some people in the world that are innately good, and her father was one of them.

His 9-year-old granddaughter, Abbey, said it was as if he had a magnet in his chest that brought people closer to him.

Besides Brenda, Jim Isgar is succeeded by his five children and numerous grandchildren.

A memorial service will be held Sunday, March 13, at 3 p.m. at the First United Methodist Church of Durango.

[The funeral service for Jim Isgar, state senator and director of the Rural Development, will be held at the First United Methodist Church Building, 1000 E. Durango Avenue, Durango, Colorado, on Sunday, March 13, 2016, at 3 p.m. The service will be held at the First United Methodist Church Building, 1000 E. Durango Avenue, Durango, Colorado, on Sunday, March 13, 2016, at 3 p.m. The service will be held at the First United Methodist Church Building, 1000 E. Durango Avenue, Durango, Colorado, on Sunday, March 13, 2016, at 3 p.m.](#)