

1989 Marks End

PIER (CITY)

PAMPHLET

An Era For Pier

Owner Of End Cafe Dies, 59

By Maresa Archer

He was the last one on the pier before a storm ripped the landmark apart, hurling his cafe out to sea.

His restaurant was the last thing John Gustafson spoke of before he died last Wednesday evening, succumbing to lung cancer after a five-month battle.

His death was a shock to friends

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and family, who believed the 59-year-old would be able to win the war against lung cancer. The disease was a mystery to them because Gustafson did not smoke.

One of the beach's most familiar characters, Gustafson died at his home at about 9 p.m. with his wife and mother at his bedside.

In the last moments of his life,

Gustafson was dictating instructions on how the pier should be rebuilt to his wife of 38 years, Alice.

"She told me it was hard for him to talk, but he wanted her to take notes. That's how important the pier was to him," said Julie Kotesh, a long-time friend.

Gustafson is described by his friends as an optimist. Even after storms washed away The End (See Gustafson, Page A4)

John Gustafson...

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Cafe twice, he was looking to the future.

"Both times he didn't have insurance. I don't think people realized that. Times got really tight for the family," Kotesh said.

Despite financial hardships, Gustafson was a generous man who was always willing to help a fellow human in need.

"He always gave jobs to the kids hanging out downtown. He'd work you real hard, but he would also reward big," Kotesh said.

Kotesh went to work at The End Cafe when she was 15. After a particularly busy 10-day period, Gustafson flew her and her sister over to Catalina for a four-day vacation.

"He dropped us off, gave us spending money and told us to have a good time. He had already paid for our rooms."

Another time, Gustafson took Kotesh and 30 other friends and employees to see "Evita" for her birthday.

He could not make it to her graduation, so Gustafson hired a plane to fly over the ceremony with a banner that read "Congratulations Julie."

Gustafson left a high-paying executive job in the food industry to run the cafe at the end of the pier.

"He said he liked watching the

sunset over the water better than sitting in an office," said Tom Bagshaw, manager of The End Cafe.

Gustafson bought the cafe in 1977. In March 1983, a storm demolished the eatery. Rebuilding took 2 1/2 years, but Gustafson opened an improved cafe in 1985. During that time, he also bought Maxie's Pizza, which came to be known as the Other End Cafe because it was at the foot of the pier.

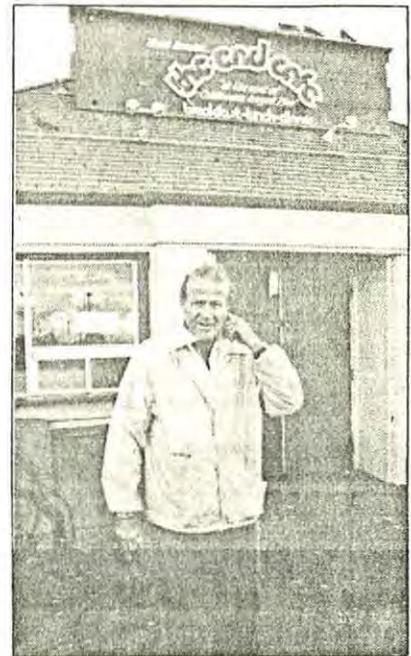
Then came the fatal Jan. 17, 1988 storm, when pounding waves crushed a 250-foot chunk of the pier, sending it to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean; taking the The End Cafe with it.

Gustafson had been inside 10 minutes before the cafe was torn away by the torrent, installing a burglar alarm. He lost all his equipment, an estimated \$200,000 worth, according to Bagshaw. The building was owned by the city.

The eternal optimist, Gustafson was talking about rebuilding the next day. His employees were standing behind him, ready to return to work when the new pier opened.

Bagshaw describes Gustafson as an easy-going boss who treated his employees well.

"It was a real pleasure to work with him because he always respected everyone's point of



OPTIMISTIC — Day after 1983 storm, John Gustafson already plans to rebuild The End Cafe.

view. If someone had an idea that would help the cafe, he'd implement it."

Gustafson is survived by his wife, Alice; two sons, John Jr. and Frank, both Huntington Beach residents; three daughters, Linda Kincannon of Denver, Mary Beth Downey of Huntington Beach and Christine Gustafson of Corona del Mar.

A memorial service will be held at 10 a.m. tomorrow at Dilday Brothers Mortuary in Huntington Beach.



Storm Washed Away Future

By Maresa Archer

When a January storm swept away a portion of the pier last year, it also washed away Ella Christensen's future.

City officials deemed the Huntington Beach Municipal Pier unsafe in July 1988, and shut it down with a two-hour notice.

"I went home to take a nap, like I did every afternoon, and a

newspaper reporter called and told me they were closing the pier.

"Finally an hour later, Max Bowman called from the city and told me I was out of business," Christensen said, proprietor of three shops on the pier: Neptune's Locker, The Captain's Galley, and the Tackle box.

By the time she got to her businesses, the city had already

closed the gate on the pier, shutting out the public and Christensen's livelihood. The city owns all the structures on the pier, and leased to businesses.

"What hurt me the most was two weeks before Max Bowman and his wife were in Neptune's Locker having a glass of wine and I told Max I had a lot of refrigeration repairs that needed to be done and I had to order a lot of merchandise for the summer.

(See Christensen, Page A4)

Ella Christensen...

(From Page A1)

"I told him I didn't want to do it if the pier was going to be closed. He told me to go ahead."

The bill for the refrigeration repairs came to \$1,200, plus, Christensen ordered \$2,000 worth of T-shirts. She estimates she had \$15,000 to \$20,000 in merchandise and equipment when the city closed her doors.

When she was allowed back on the pier three days later to try and salvage what she could, much of the food had perished.

A professional auction house was hired to sell the equipment and merchandise.

"I didn't have any place to store the stuff and I didn't think the city would let me back. And I sure as Sam Hill wasn't going to open anything downtown."

Christensen received less than 50 percent of what the goods were worth. After almost four decades of work, Christensen had \$6,000.

For 38 years, the Christensen family were merchants on the landmark. Christensen was the first person there in the morning to unlock the gates and open the pier to the dawn fishermen.

Christensen is used to rising early; she used to get up every day to feed the livestock on the family's Colorado farm.

She and her husband, Carl, worked the farm until 1949, when Carl's health forced them to give up the homestead and move to a warmer climate. The couple packed up their belongings and children and moved to New Mexico.

After a few years, Carl's health improved and the family headed

for the West Coast.

"Carl had been out here when he was young, but I had never seen the ocean, and we wanted to get the kids in a good school," Christensen said.

The family stayed with friends in Huntington Beach, who told them about a tackle shop that was for sale on the pier. The couple took the money left from the sale of their farm and bought the Tackle Box.

On a beautiful April day in 1951, the Christensens opened the doors of their new business.

A few days later, a storm came up during the night and washed most of the fishing boats up on the beach.

"We walked down the pier that day and wondered what we had gotten ourselves into," Christensen said.

For the rest of that spring, Mother Nature was unkind to the new business, sending clouds and fog every day. Carl and Ella would pound the pier rails with pipes during the foggy days to let boats know how close they were to the pier.

Although Carl had done some fishing in his day, Ella was new to the sport and had to learn the business by trial and error.

"I didn't know beans about fishing, and the first time I had to repair a reel I had to pull apart five new ones to see how they worked.

"I also got out my Girl Scout book to learn how to tie knots."

The first salesman that came to the tackle shop realized he was dealing with naive business people and sold them all the



Independent Photo By Brian Micka

Ella Christensen

merchandise he couldn't get rid of elsewhere. Luckily for the Christensens, the next salesman saw what the first had done and took all the stuff back and gave the couple lessons in ordering.

"He gave us such good advice we stayed with him for years," she said.

Another tackle shop owner that was on the pier advised that the couple stay away from helping the children that would hang out on the pier fishing because they were bad for business and would nickel and dime the stores, but not spend any real money.

But the Christensens enjoyed helping the kids and always had time to pull a fish hook out of a pair of pants or help them tie a knot.

Soon kids were flocking to the store, bringing their parents with them.

"Those kids grew up and

(See HB Pier, Page A5)

HB Pier...

(From Page A4)

brought their own kids to the shop and later, their grandchildren," Christensen said with a smile.

The Christensens had planned to retire in 1965, but the other tackle shop on the pier came up for sale, and with the help of her parents, Joy Christensen, Ella and Carl's daughter, went into business.

She changed the tackle shop to a sandwich and beer bar called Neptune's Locker. The shop was a goldmine.

Carl died a few years later. Ever the business woman, Ella made the walk to the pier alone every morning.

When the Captain's Galley came up for sale, Christensen snapped it up and made it a

success.

Working at her businesses kept the now 75-year-old feeling young. She said she enjoyed the children that came to fish and the young people looking for work. She always tried to help with a job when she could.

That was one of the hardest parts about being shut down, she said, having to tell her employees they were out of jobs.

"I had about 15 people working for me when the city closed us down. It was hard turning those people out," Christensen said.

Since the city put her out of business, she sits at home wondering what to do.

"Maybe I'll go back to school, or start oil painting.

"I'm on a downhill trend. When you get to be my age you don't look at the future, just at your time left."