

Pollard soldiers on for Vancouver

Former mayor honored as Community Foundation's First Citizen for 2010



Photo by Troy Wayrynen

Former Vancouver Mayor Royce Pollard, center, enjoys a laugh with wife Margaret Pollard, left, Andy Nygard, right, and Andy's wife Cheree Nygard. Andy Nygard — who lives in Hazel Dell, outside the city of Vancouver — nominated Pollard for the First Citizen honor.

By **Scott Hewitt**
Columbian staff writer

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Royce Pollard lost his bid for a seventh term as the mayor of America's Vancouver last November — but he sure didn't lose the love of his friends and admirers.

Hundreds of them packed the downtown Hilton Vancouver Washington on Thursday to applaud, cheer and wave American flags as Pollard, 71, was named Clark County's First Citizen for 2010 by the Community Foundation for Southwest Washington.

The former Army colonel and Vancouver Barracks commander returned the favor with a speech that was part farewell address and part vow to keep on fighting — for community development, for healthy and safe children, and for veterans returning from overseas.

"I am committed to helping them when they come back," he said. "They need jobs. If you own a business, I want you to help me help them when they return. So I'll be by to see you."

Rick Melching, executive director of the Community Foundation, began the festivities by listing Pollard's most visible accomplishments as mayor: the redevelopment of



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The Community Foundation honored Royce Pollard as Clark County's First Citizen for 2010 at the Hilton Vancouver Washington on Thursday.



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Officers Row and Esther Short Park, the creation of the Firstenburg Community Center and two new libraries, plans for a new waterfront development and the retention of a veterans hospital that was in jeopardy, the Mill Plain Boulevard extensions and a network of new biking and walking trails along the waterfront and throughout the city.

But those were the obvious things, Melching concluded. The biggest thing — and the easiest to overlook — has been Pollard's relentless belief in Vancouver as a city capable of greatness.

"Giving our community a stronger sense of self" was his most significant achievement, Melching said. "In many ways, he woke us up to our potential and our possibilities."

Pollard's endlessly positive style was the theme of the event. Community leaders from Paul Christensen to Arch Miller to Val Ogden and Todd Horenstein rose to serenade Pollard with a Bing Crosby classic that seemed to sum him up: "You've got to accentuate the positive, eliminate the negative, latch onto the affirmative, don't mess with Mister In-Between."

Pollard made clear he never was, and never will be, Mister In-Between: "I am a soldier. I still consider myself a soldier for this community. And I will die a soldier."

A quick-cut video slide show illustrated the former mayor's irrepressible spirit: Pollard up in a cherry picker with city workers; Pollard seated with a class of students; Pollard riding his bike on the waterfront trail at the head of a small army of cyclists; Pollard splashing into the Hough Pool, fully clothed, during a fundraiser; Pollard smashing a Portland mug that was on sale in a coffee shop in his beloved Vancouver — the ultimate taboo.

All of which made him Vancouver's greatest cheerleader, according to Florence Wager, last year's First Citizen.

"I'm sure you would agree that when the U.S. Army posted Royce Pollard to the Vancouver Barracks, Vancouver was the luckiest city in America," Wager said. We had the right man in the right place at the right time." Pollard made a commitment to the city that "moved it forward light years. Progress isn't made without superior leadership, and that's what we had," she said.

Pollard, who was a city councilman for seven years and then mayor for 14, responded: "Previous mayors laid the foundation for what we have today. I was lucky."

But he followed that gracious gesture with some typically tough truth telling. He cautioned people against equating the military with the policymakers who direct it.

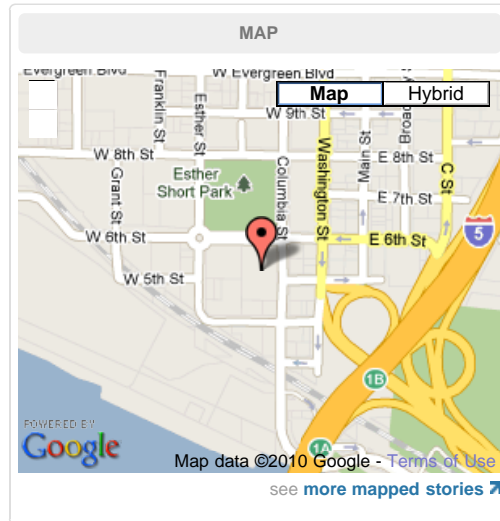
"We have some great politicians," he said. "We have some lousy ones too. If that makes you nervous, you're the ones I'm talking about."

He said he's hoping to see a replacement Interstate 5 bridge built "in my lifetime" — a reference to the Columbia River Crossing project that seems to be dragging across the years.

And he said he believes Vancouver must continue to expand.

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“We need to be bigger,” he said. “Whether you like it or not, size matters. Hazel Dell at some point in time needs to annex to the city of Vancouver. We can help them achieve what they want to achieve. They’re not moving as fast as they could if they were part of a city.”

Pollard thanked his wife, Margaret, for sticking with him through the decades — through an itinerant military career and then a civic and political one based in a Pacific Northwest town they’d never heard of before they got here. If not for her, he said, none of what he’s accomplished could have happened.

He donated the \$1,000 First Citizen prize to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Southwest Washington. And he’s just getting Royce Pollard Counseling and Mentoring, his new political consulting business, off the ground.

“I’m not done yet,” he concluded.

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