

FEATURED

# James 'Doc' McClellan, noted Frederick political figure, dies at 90

By Allen Etzler aetzler@newspost.com 7 hrs ago 0



James E. "Doc" McClellan

File photo



There's a reason the Edward P. Thomas Jr. Memorial Swimming Pool at Baker Park has the name it does.

In the early 1980s, state Sen. Charles Smelser and Delegate James E. "Doc" McClellan were at odds on proposed renovations to the pool. Smelser was reluctant to spend the money needed to make it happen.

McClellan — who died Saturday — proposed to name the pool after Sen. Thomas, a close friend and confidant of both Smelser and McClellan. Thomas died in 1983.

"You SOB, he couldn't even swim," Blaine Young, a former president of the Frederick County Board of County Commissioners, recalled Smelser telling McClellan. "How are you going to name a pool after a man who couldn't swim?"

McClellan knew his colleague couldn't vote against a memorial to a fellow senator.

"He just knew how to get things done," Young said. "He got more done by accident than most did on purpose."

McClellan, one of the leaders of the revitalization of downtown Frederick and a key figure in the politics of western Maryland, died Saturday at Buckingham's Choice retirement facility after his health had been steadily declining for years. He was 90.

McClellan leaves behind a wife, Betty, whom he met at Parkway Elementary School in Frederick, and six children: James R. McClellan, Gail Snyder, Bernie McClellan, Barbara Stanley, Debby McClellan and Terry McArthur.

McClellan was elected to the city's Board of Aldermen in 1973, the same time that Ron Young, now a state senator, was elected mayor of Frederick. The two served together for four years before McClellan was elected as a state delegate. He served 16 years in that capacity.

He was a key figure in bringing the rural parts of western, southern and the Eastern Shore of Maryland together to obtain the money that would have usually gone to Montgomery, Prince George's and Baltimore counties at the time. With the help of the House speaker at the time, Casper Taylor Jr., his close friend, McClellan was able to ensure Frederick County had the money it needed to fund different projects.

During that time, McClellan built a close relationship with Blaine Young. Blaine Young lived in the McClellans' third-floor apartment after graduating from college and also worked as McClellan's driver as part of the rent agreement. He saw firsthand how much McClellan could get done.

"Doc McClellan could walk into the biggest dive in Frederick County or walk into the most elite club in Frederick County and get along with everyone," Blaine Young said. "Everyone was a friend, and no matter where he was, someone left that place better off."

Blaine Young grew to see McClellan as a father figure. He named his now-15-year-old son James Ronald Young — after his father and McClellan.

In McClellan's time as alderman with Ron Young as mayor, the city's leaders established the first city parking garage behind Brewer's Alley, started burying electrical wires, started the Weinberg Center for the Arts and worked on bringing shops and restaurants back into vacant buildings. It marked the start of Frederick's downtown revitalization.

McClellan, who worked as a large-animal veterinarian, was also a driving force in getting the money and completing what is now the Carroll Creek Linear Park and flood control system after the 1976 flood. McClellan had just moved into a new vet clinic that was built for him and his son James R. McClellan to practice out of when the flood happened.

"We had just moved in and seven months in, we were under 7 feet of water," James R. McClellan said. "So, I can certainly see a big difference in Frederick now."

But the change didn't happen overnight after the milestone flood. Ron Young released the conceptual plans in his tenure as mayor while McClellan was an alderman. But construction didn't

begin until 1985, well into McClellan's tenure in the Maryland General Assembly.

"He used to tell me, 'It was your dad's vision, but it was my hangover,'" Blaine Young recalls.

Upon McClellan's leaving the state Legislature, the governor at the time, Parris Glendening, appointed him to the Frederick County liquor board, which is officially called the Board of License Commissioners, on which he served until 2012.

McClellan also served on the Frederick County Fair Board for 66 years. He was chairman of the committee that was responsible for setting up entertainment at the annual Great Frederick Fair.

"He's a big reason we have been introduced to big entertainment during the fair," said Clyde Crum, who served on the fair board with McClellan from 1975 until McClellan retired in 2012. "He was the leader. Anywhere Doc was, people knew he was the leader."

After officially retiring at 86, McClellan told *The Frederick News-Post* he wanted "to try to enjoy myself and do some things that I want to do."

"I can't imagine what that could have been, because anything Doc McClellan wanted to do, he did," Crum said.

Follow Allen Etzler on Twitter: @AllenWEtzler.