

# Myra Castner, influential principal in Campbell schools

BY MACK LUNDSTROM  
Mercury News Staff Writer

As a risk-taker, Myra Castner didn't just talk about getting parents involved in the education of their children.

When she was principal of Hazelwood Elementary School, she set up a nerve center for parents in the Campbell Union district, called it the VIP Room, and challenged mothers and fathers to live up to the Very Important Parent title.

"She took some money to hire a parent to work in there," said Connie Elness, her successor as Hazelwood principal. "It became a resource library for parents all over the district, where they could find books and magazines and get help with problems.

"Parent education classes were held there. It was a focal point for volunteer parent programs."

And it was evidence of the reason there was an outpouring of love and respect by teachers and families when they learned that



■ **Born:** Nov. 5, 1929, Cleveland, Ohio. ■ **Died:** Feb. 27, 1993, Bountiful, Utah. ■ **Survived by:** Husband, Tom Castner of San Jose; daughters, Sarah Castner of Salem, Ore., Meg Castner of San Jose; sisters, Ann Rathbun of Troy, Mich., Carolyn Mavelle of Bradenton, Fla. ■ **Services:** Memorial at 2 p.m. Saturday at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, 13601 Saratoga Ave., Saratoga; private inurnment in Michigan. ■ **Memorial:** Donations may be made to the San Jose Historical Museum Association, 1650 Senter Road, San Jose, Calif. 95112.

Mrs. Castner had died Saturday at the age of 63 in an emergency clinic in Bountiful, Utah.

"She was an absolutely, incredibly remarkable woman," said Elness, "a principal for 20 years who had a tremendous impact on

education" throughout Santa Clara County.

Mary Ann Carr, program manager for academic and community relations for IBM's Adstar Division in San Jose, was so impressed with Mrs. Castner that she continually referred to her work in talks and conferences.

Carr found 60 parents on campus the day she first visited Mrs. Castner's school. "I use her as an example of how one individual can really make a difference."

Although she was principal at Hazelwood for only three years, its parents thought so much of her that they renamed the school's library the Myra H. Castner Library when she retired in 1991.

The school had earned the California Distinguished School Award under her leadership.

Mrs. Castner worked in the Campbell district for 32 years, and for a decade had been principal at Blackford Elementary, where she originated Law Day,

during which all facets of law enforcement were represented to the children.

She was the originator of the annual Asilomar Reading Conference and the Young Authors' Fair of Santa Clara County.

She also was principal at Moorpark and Marshall Lane schools and taught at Sherman Oaks and Capri schools.

Mrs. Castner grew up in Grosse Pointe, Mich., and graduated from the University of Michigan. She followed that with a master's degree from the University of Utah, where the family lived when her husband, Tom, took a job with Lockheed. He stayed with the missiles and space company for 30 years. The family moved to San Jose in 1967.

For her daughters, Mrs. Castner was "our best friend," said Sarah Castner, an assistant attorney general for the state of Oregon. "She gave motherhood and her work and her career more

than 100 percent. In my mind she was the epitome of the career woman. She did it all."

Her daughter Meg is a environmental and safety representative for Hewlett-Packard.

After she retired, Mrs. Castner became a travel agent.

In February, she and her husband and their longtime friends Darryl and Sandy Sawyer had gone to Utah for a vacation hiking in the snow at an elder hostel. After suffering a seizure Feb. 26 in Moab, the following day she went to an emergency clinic in Bountiful, where she suffered a second seizure and died.

When friends gather to say goodbye Saturday, said friend Kathy Tuttle, they will participate in a service in thanksgiving for the life of Mrs. Castner — as expressed by her school secretary, Char Silva: "Myra's gift was her ability to bring out the best in everyone else and make them so proud of the job they could do."