



“I regret leaving Congress because I’m no longer able to represent the Victor Valley.” Jerry Lewis

LEWIS RETIRES WITH FOND MEMORIES

Longest serving Republican member of Congress in California history

BY LYNNEA LOMBARDO / STAFF WRITER

Jerry Lewis was elected to Congress during Jimmy Carter’s presidency in 1978 and has secured more than 60 percent of the vote in every re-election bid since.

The beloved ex-politician, however, announced his retirement last January after redistricting split his 41st District into two new districts, the 8th — which includes the entire High Desert — and the 31st.

“I stayed in Congress longer than I ever thought I would be,” said Lewis, 77, during a phone interview from his home in Redlands. “It has been a great privilege to serve all these years in Congress and I’ve represented most of the High Desert almost my entire career.”

Lewis, who remains the longest-serving Republican member of Congress in California history, began his public service career on the San Bernardino Board of Education in 1965. In 1968, he moved to the state Assembly where he helped establish the South Coast Air Quality Management District and was the first member from the state to be named chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. Lewis spent a total of 46 years in elected office and 33 years representing San Bernardino and Riverside counties. His last day in office was Jan. 3.

Lewis, R-Redlands, said that the growth and development of the High Desert has been a main focus for him during his career and retiring was one of the most difficult decisions he had to make after 17 terms in office.

“I regret leaving Congress because I’m no longer able to represent the Victor Valley,” Lewis said. “All the desert communities have been wonderful to work with all these years.”

According to former Victorville mayor, Terry Caldwell, Lewis was instrumental in obtaining much of the progress that that has happened in the High Desert.

“Jerry has represented the city in one way or another since it was incorporated in September of 1962,” Caldwell said. “And he’s done so with great distinction and great accomplishment.”

Caldwell said that when he thinks of Lewis’s most relevant contribution, what comes to his mind is the city’s acquisition of the almost 5,000 acres of land at George Air Force Base.

“Getting that property is heavily attributed to Congressman Lewis and his willingness to go the extra mile for his constituents in the Victor Valley,” Caldwell said. “He ultimately allowed the city to acquire the base on extraordinarily favorable terms. He saved the city — and therefore the taxpayers — literally millions of dollars on acquisition costs.”

Lewis laughed when he recalled working on a pipeline project that ran from Barstow to the Victor Valley.

“I’ll never forget that when we dug the ditch for the pipeline, we were constantly reminded that the desert tortoise lives along that trench,” Lewis said with a laugh. “And we never saw one desert tortoise.”

Lewis was also instrumental in securing funding for the Lewis Center for Educational Research in Apple Valley. Cheryl Thompson, spokesperson for the k-12 academy, said that Lewis — for which the school is named — helped the school acquire the Goldstone Apple Valley Radio Telescope, which is used in collaboration with NASA and the Jet Propulsion Laboratory so students could work on space research.

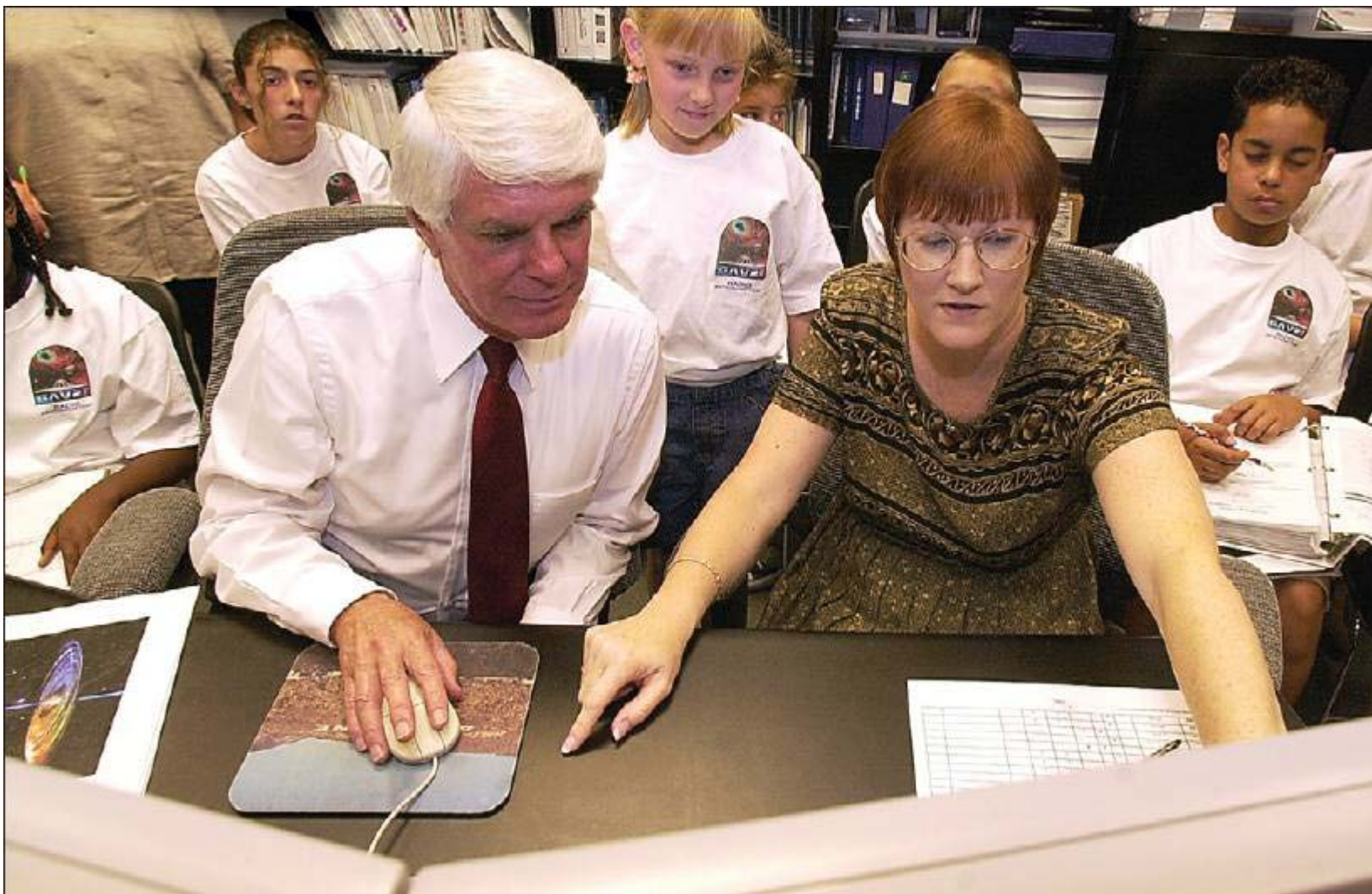
“Jerry was instrumental in pointing us in the right direction to get funding,” Thompson said. “He believed in education and he had an innovative and courageous take on it.”

Although Lewis is out of office, he will finally get to see the Ranchero Road Interchange break ground on Friday in Hesperia, which received a \$1 million earmark from Lewis in 2010.

For now, Lewis said that he has no immediate future plans and looks forward to enjoying retirement.

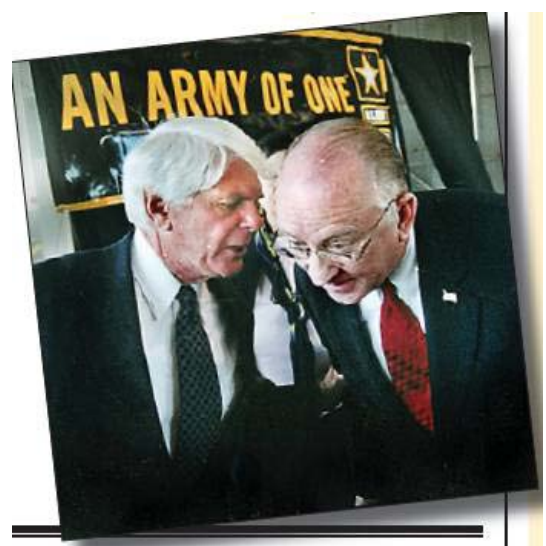
“We have many a chapter ahead of us,” Lewis said. “We’re not anxious to make any decisions too quickly. I just hope that people remember how much my wife and I enjoyed and loved the desert communities.”

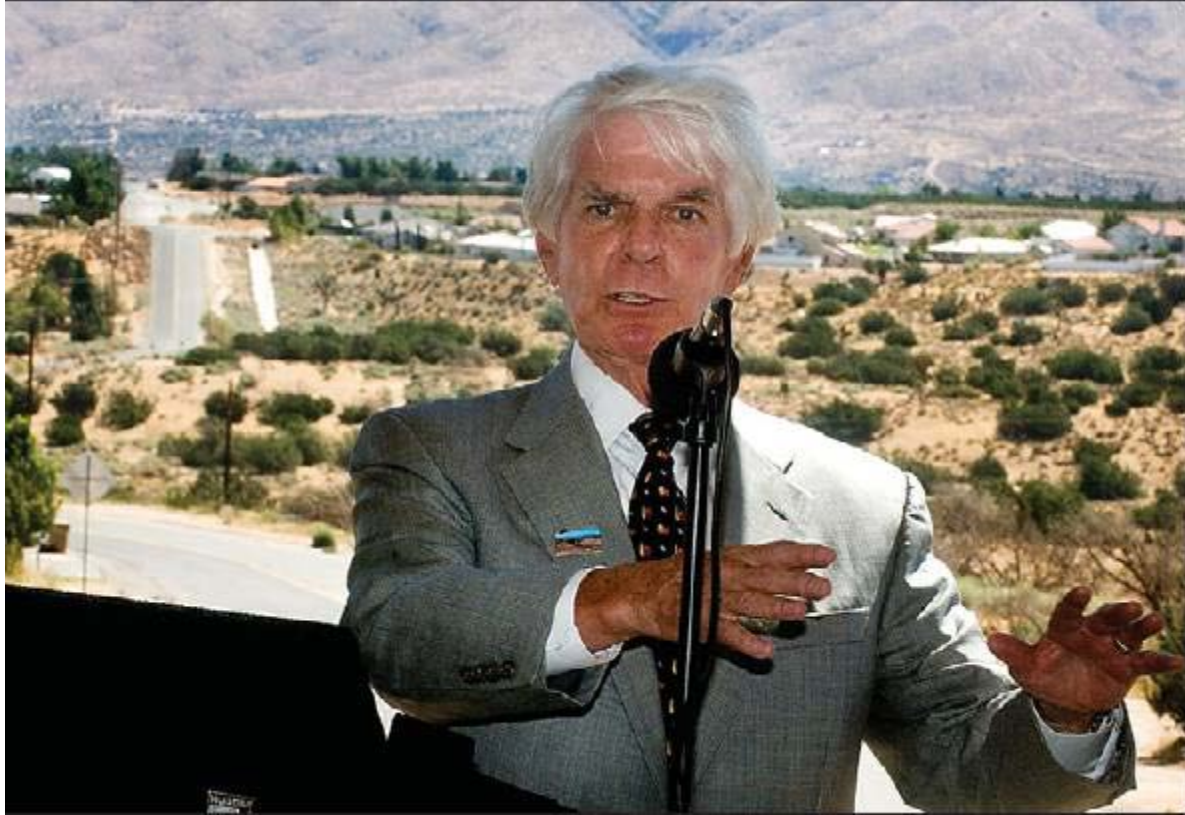
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FILE PHOTO: DAILY PRESS - LEWIS CENTER TOP: Congressman Jerry Lewis gets some practical application from Kelli Cole on calibrating a radio device that measures quazars and polarizations in space at the Lewis Center for Educational Research in Apple Valley on May 30, 2003.

In the photo to the right, Lewis and Howard P. 'Buck' McKeon chat during the UH-60 Black Hawk Rollout Ceremony at Southern California Logistics Airport in Victorville on Feb. 22, 2002.





FILE PHOTO: DAILY PRESS

GROUND BREAKING: U.S. Representative Jerry Lewis talks about the achievements made in gathering funds to build the Rancho Underpass during a ground breaking ceremony Aug. 30, 2011, for the project.

FILE PHOTO: DAILY PRESS



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