

Ufert showed love of City of Wood River, community members until final day

by Dan Brannan, Content Director
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Wood River Mayor Fred Ufert will be remembered as a man who truly loved the City of Wood River up until the final moments of his life.

Ufert was working Monday and said he was having back issues. At about 10 or 11 in the morning on Monday, he went home and he did not return for the day, City Manager Jim Schneider said.

“Fred’s back was killing him,” Schneider said. “He said he was going home to lay down. Through the day, his back started to hurt him more and in the evening, he went to Saint Anthony’s Health Center. It was discovered he had an aortic aneurysm and he was transported by medical helicopter to Barnes Hospital and it went downhill from there.”

Ufert, 65, died at 8:30 a.m. today. He had been the mayor of Wood River since 2005.

Wood River City Manager Jim Schneider said Ufert's death is "devastating" and very sudden.

"You will not find a person more committed to the City of Wood River than Fred Ufert," Schneider said. "He was in here every day working toward making the city prosper. You will not find a more caring person. I know he even received tons of calls at home."

"Fred would look into it and call you back and have you come to City Hall and most of the time talk in person," Schneider said of his work ethic. "I don't know if anyone realizes how much he meant to the citizens of the city. It was unbelievable how much time he spent with the citizens trying to help them."

Ufert was a veteran and one of his proudest accomplishments was the Veterans War Memorial in Wood River.

"He wanted to see that memorial," Schneider said of the veterans' tribute.

Many citizens of Wood River are shocked at how quickly things went downhill for Ufert.

"After working every day side by side, this is just so sudden," said Schneider. "He came in Monday with back pain and thought he had twisted his back. For it to turn into this is pretty shocking."

Schneider said Ufert had many achievements in the city, making it difficult to single out the best, but he thought about how sufficiently the mayor led an effort to solve the flooding issues on the east side of town.

"Citizens on the east side of town often had 2 feet of water in their yard and ruined basements year after year," Schneider said. "He took that sewer separation project and made it happen."

Wood River City Clerk Jan Sneed agreed with Schneider, that key successes during Ufert's tenure were the flood control project, the veterans' memorial at Central Park and the economic boost Wood River has witnessed in recent years.

"He helped us be able to grow more and provide more infrastructure in getting business," Sneed said. "He was a big part of the car dealerships coming on Edwardsville

Road and the Walmart Supercenter. Another big accomplishment was Wood River getting the BP donation for the police station. We will probably break ground for that over the summer.”

Ufert is a shining example of what it takes to be an excellent mayor and an overall person, his good friend Schneider said.

“There are a lot of people committed to their jobs and cities, but he took hundreds of calls late into the night and he would always talk to me and tell me about the concern,” Schneider said. “It didn’t matter who you were, he would talk to you and actually meet with you no matter what time of the day or evening. If there was a problem, he would be there talk with you and try to help.”

Sneed said losing Ufert was “difficult,” for people with the city and the entire community.

“He did a wonderful job,” she said. “He was a great asset for our whole community, not only serving on the city council and mayor, but he served on school boards, too,” she said. “He will be dearly missed in the community and as a dear friend to all of us.”