

Roger Galatas, key figure in Woodlands history, dies

By [Jeff Forward](#) 3:40 pm CDT, Friday, August 30, 2019

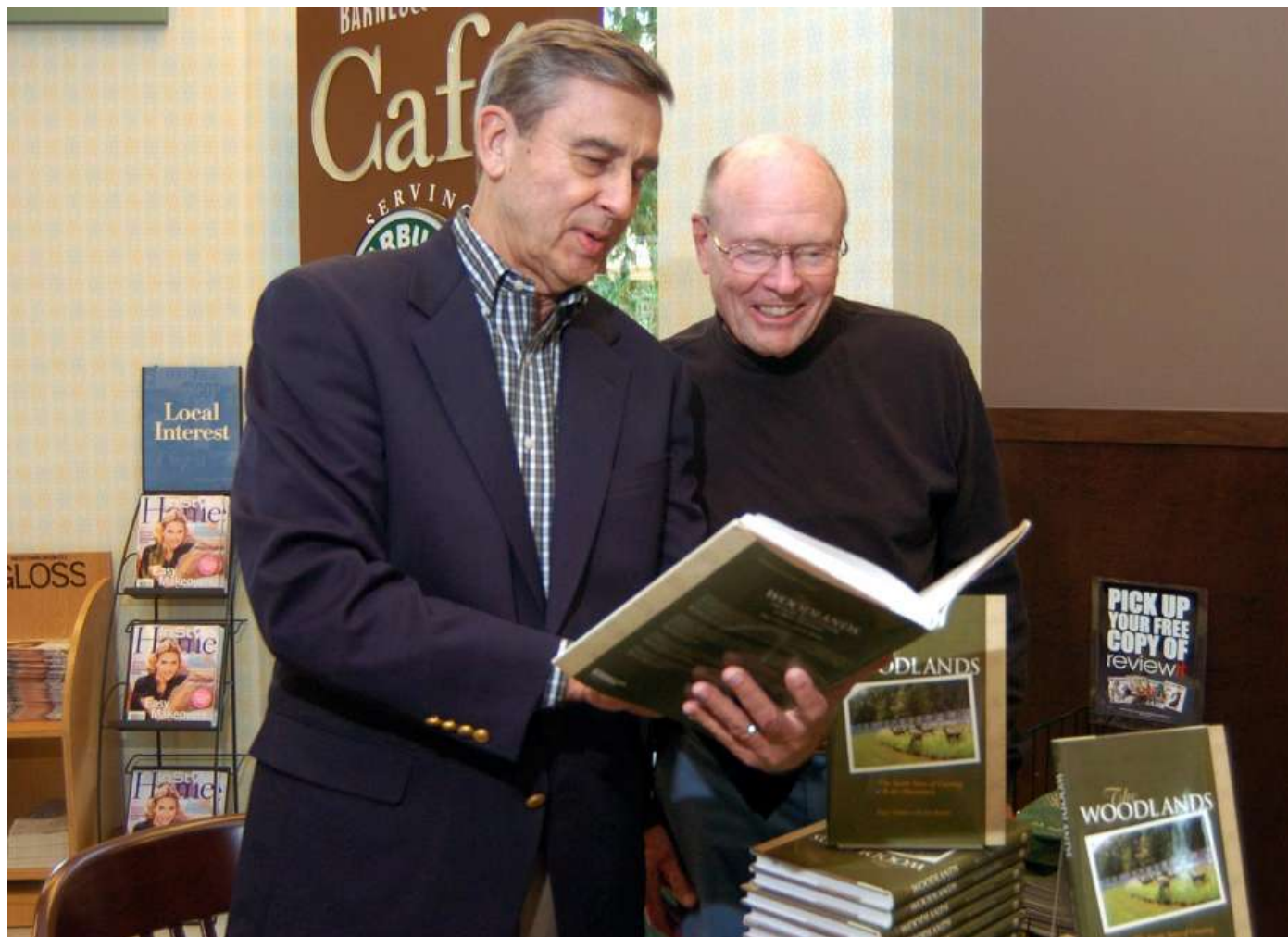


Photo: David Hopper, Freelance / For The Chronicle

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Roger Galatas and Al Kintigh, *The Woodlands*, look for a passage in Galatas's new book. Galatas, author of "The Inside Story of Creating a Better Hometown," died Thursday, Aug. 29, at 83 years of age.

Roger Galatas, one of the key figures in the development of The Woodlands, has died. He was 83.

According to a release from officials with The Woodlands Development Co., Galatas died Thursday.

Tim Welbes and Alex Sutton, the co-presidents of The Woodlands Development Co., a division of The Howard Hughes Corp., issued a joint statement on Galatas' death on Friday.

"We are deeply saddened by the passing of Roger Galatas. Mr. Galatas served as president and CEO of The Woodlands Operating Company, L.P. for 20 years, when he began his career with the company in 1979. He was responsible for the company's real estate activities, strategic development, marketing and financial performance," Welbes and Sutton wrote. "Galatas also helped found The Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion; was a founding director of The Woodlands Hospital, now Memorial Hermann The Woodlands Medical Center, and The John Cooper School. He was also a past president of the Conroe Independent School District with a school named in his honor, Galatas Elementary School in The Woodlands, part of Conroe ISD. With Jim Barlow, Roger Galatas wrote, *The Woodlands, The Inside Story of Creating a Better Hometown*. The Howard Hughes Corp. will miss Roger Galatas and will fondly remember him as a visionary in real estate development and the arts, and a leader in education."

Bruce Tough, who was president of the Woodlands Community Association from 2000-2005 and was a member of the first Board of Directors of the newly-created The Woodlands Township — eventually serving four terms on the board — said Galatas was extremely committed to The Woodlands and maintaining George Mitchell's vision of the master planned community. Part of that task, Tough said, was the creation of George's Coffee Club, which meets monthly with members and guests who discuss the community, local politics and the future of one of the nation's pioneering master planned communities.

"Roger was so dedicated to preserving The Woodlands and George Mitchell's vision, he presided over the Aug. 19 meeting of George's coffee club. We knew he was sick, he knew it himself, but he said, 'Don't count me out,'" Tough recalled of the meeting on Aug. 19. "It was a blessing to know Roger and to be his friend. (The Woodlands) Was his passion, he is really going to be missed. I don't think a lot of people here now realize how much of a role Roger had in the development of the community. It is sad to lose these treasures we have, but his legacy will carry on."

Mike Maher, Head of School of The John Cooper School, said the entire staff and student body were saddened to learn of Galatas' death and will remember the role he played in creating the school decades ago.

"The John Cooper School is very sad to learn of the passing of Mr. Roger Galatas," Maher said in a statement issued by school officials. "Mr. Galatas played a significant leadership role in the founding and early development of The John Cooper School, for which we will be forever grateful. Our condolences are extended the Galatas family and Roger's colleagues from The Woodlands Development Company."

On HoustonChronicle.com: [Roger Galatas helps link the past, present and future of The Woodlands](#)

In a telephone interview with The Villager, Welbes discussed Galatas' impact on the community and said his vision and insistence that the development of the community be a priority for future owners of The Woodlands Development Co. was a large part of the reason the community was able to maintain the look, feel and atmosphere that founder George Mitchell had envisioned in the early 1970s.

Welbes recalled one event — the Bottom of the Lake Festival — that for him showed the character Galatas had that combined astute leadership that

motivated his staff but also showed he “wasn’t afraid to roll up his sleeves and break a sweat for the community.”

“The are for Lake Woodlands had been excavated to the needed depth and the dam built, but before it was filled with water, they had the Bottom of the Lake Festival. It was kind of like Woodstcok but without the music. Roger had them connect a hose to a fire hydrant and we poured wated into an area and made a mud pit. He had leaders get in there and do a “mud slinging” contest for fun. Roger was very much the orchestra leader...he was very successful as the orchestra leader,” Welbes said of Galatas’ leadership skills and acumen. “(Bottom of the Lake Festival) was one of those community spirit building events Roger was so good at. It was a milestone event in the development of The Woodlands.”

Galatas was very similar to Mitchell, Welbes said, in that he was an avid supporter and promoter of high-quality education, supported religious institutions and charities like Interfaith of The Woodlands and the United Way and had a commitment to community spirit, unity and also creating infrastructure for residents to have better lives and work closer to their homes.

“He was a uniter and he knew how to make it all work together,” Welbes added. “(Galatas) Made many efforts to unite the north and south Montgomery County residents and officials, and that continues today as we grow into a more urban area.”

Bridging generations in The Woodlands

The Woodlands was famously invented by oil and gas tycoon George Mitchell in the early 1970s, as he sought to build an enclave north of Houston for residents who may want to escape the growing urban environment and live in a master-planned community with trees and

elaborately designed roads and infrastructure.

Galatas arrived at The Woodlands Development Co. in 1979 and worked as the successor of former company president Ed Lee, Welbes said. Galatas helped with many areas of development of the community, he added, and set high standards for his staff then and for those who would follow him after he and others retired. Galatas worked with the company until it was sold in the late 1990s. Galatas remained on staff as a consultant for the new owners for several years before moving into the private sector and running his own consulting business.

Tough said he first met Galatas through his father, Coulson Tough, who was another pivotal figure in the creation and development of The Woodlands. Those early interactions, Tough said, led him to develop an appreciation and then later a deep friendship with Galatas as their life paths intertwined over the next several decades.

"My knowing Rogers goes way back to my father, who was hired by George Mitchell as part of the 'Dream Team.' I knew Roger from social events I attended with my father. When he was advising the companies that bought the Woodlands Development Company, Roger was all involved in negotiating the crafting of The Woodlands Community Association with Morgan Stanley officials," Tough recalled. "(Roger) Was the last president (of The Woodlands Development Company) that worked under George Mitchell. I had a chance then to get to know Roger better and it led to a great friendship. Roger was so passionate about maintaining the community of The Woodlands and Mitchell's vision, which then led to the formation of George's Coffee Club."

Tough said that after 2000, when the population of the township had just surpassed 50,000, Galatas was concerned with newcomers who might

have wanted to alter The Woodlands in ways Mitchell would not have approved of.

“(At the time) George Mitchell’s vision was being hijacked by every ‘Johnny Come Lately’ to move into The Woodlands,” Tough said. “The Woodlands was a place unlike any other place in the world. Roger was a warrior, a great man.”

Galatas, a geologist and former Air Force meteorologist, originally worked for Humble Oil, which became Exxon Mobil Corp. The company had moved him into their former land development arm, Friendswood Development. Galatas was responsible for the full range of business activities and strategic planning for the 28,000-acre development, marketing, management and financial performance of all Mitchell Energy's assets.

Galatas has been directly involved in the creation of several unique elements within The Woodlands, including the Cynthia Woods Mitchell Pavilion, Lake Woodlands, The Woodlands Hospital (before it was purchased by Memorial Hermann) and the first college preparatory school in the area, the John Cooper School.

And his impact did not end with The Woodlands: Galatas was also a founding director and coordinated the development of The Woodlands Hospital, then served on the board of the Memorial Hermann Hospital System after the system bought the hospital. He also was a founding director of the John Cooper School and president of the board of trustees of the Conroe Independent School District. A new elementary school in The Woodlands was named in his honor. Galatas left his post at The Woodlands Operating Co., when the company was sold in 1997 — and stayed on for another two years to guide the transition.

“He was the driving force in showing the new owners what Mr. Mitchell’s

vision was and how to move the community forward," Welbes said of the two years Galatas consulted for the new owners of the company. "He showed them how to do this community the right way and that it would take patience and adherence to the standards that had made The Woodlands unique."

Welbes also credited Galatas for not merely focusing on "real estate development" as others might in different companies or regions of the nation, but instead valuing "community development" so all residents felt like neighbors and that The Woodlands enabled connections amongst its residents.

"He was a master of details and the aspects of growth and all facets of community development, not just real estate development," Welbes said. "Roger certainly set high standards for his employees then and afterward, in order to maintain and achieve the community spirit of The Woodlands."

— *Lindsay Peyton contributed to this story.*

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