

Former mayor, 'true leader,' dies at age 84

By Mike Glenn
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Former El Paso Mayor Judson F. Williams left a legacy of civic accomplishments that will live on, his friends said Saturday.

Williams died Friday at the age of 84 from complications of Alzheimer's disease.

"We've lost not only a marvelous person but a very good friend. I always had the greatest respect for Judson," said former Mayor Peter DeWetter, who followed Williams into City Hall. "He was a visionary, in addition to being a leader."

Williams — who was elected in 1963 and served until 1969 — also was president of the El Paso Chamber of Commerce, the Sun Carnival and the Jaycees.

Current Chamber President Wes Jurey called Williams' contributions to the city, including his work establishing the civic center, "immeasurable."

"I think he was one of the true leaders of the community," Jurey said.

Williams came to El Paso in 1940 as public relations director for the Texas College of Mines, now the University of Texas at El Paso. He was there 16 years, and higher-education continued to be an important part of his life.

During his post-mayoral tenure as chairman of Texas Tech University's Board of Regents, Williams was instrumental in establishing the Texas Tech Health Science Center in El Paso.

"There was a tremendous opposition to that.

Several other areas wanted it, (and) Tech wanted to keep it in Lubbock," said



Michael Ridley, Williams son-in-law. "He was very, very proud of that — and rightfully so." During a 1963 visit to El Paso by President John F. Kennedy, Williams pressed for federal action on the lingering Chamizal dispute between the United States and Mexico.

"We had a special badge made up in gold for Jackie (Kennedy), and a pair of old Colt .45 revolvers in leather holsters for (him)," Williams said in an El Paso Times article.

After presenting the gifts, Williams managed to get an interview with Kennedy.

"He assured me that we could get the government's help on this," Williams said. "It took two years of lobbying in Washington, D.C., but the agreement was finally made."

Survivors include his widow, Jackie Roe Williams; four children; and 11 grandchildren.

Visitation will be from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. today at Harding Orr & McDaniel, 320 Montana.

A memorial service will be at 2 p.m. Monday at First Presbyterian Church, 1340 Murchison, and burial will be at Memory Gardens of the Valley Cemetery, 4900 McNutt.