

Former Oregon State Hospital leader Dean Brooks dies at 96

Written by Capi Lynn Statesman Journal
Jun. 09

statesmanjournal.com



Dean Brooks, former superintendent at Oregon State Hospital, on Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2011.

Dean Brooks, former superintendent at Oregon State Hospital, on Wednesday, Dec. 21, 2011. / CAPI LYNN / Statesman Journal file

Memorial service

The family is planning a memorial service that will be held in the coming weeks at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Salem and will release details when finalized. In lieu of flowers, the family asks that donations be made to one of the organizations that were dear to Dr. Dean Brooks' heart: St. Paul's Music Ministry; the Oregon State Hospital Museum of Mental

Health; Willamette Valley Hospice; and Housing Hope in Washington, a housing program for the homeless and mentally ill.

Dr. Dean Brooks never wasted an opportunity to remind those working in the mental health field of their responsibility to put patients first.

As little as seven weeks ago, he spoke on that subject during a luncheon with the medical staff at the Oregon State Hospital, where he was superintendent from 1955 to 1981.

"He shared a story about how his secretary always arranged the mail in his in-box with anything from the governor's office on the bottom and anything from the patients on top," said Greg Roberts, current superintendent at the state hospital. "That's his legacy, his mantra, to always remember the patients come first."

Brooks died Thursday morning in his apartment at Willson House, a retirement community not far from the hospital that he remained connected to more than three decades after retirement. He was 96.

He was surrounded by family, including his three daughters, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Daughter Dennie Brooks said his health took a turn for the worse a couple weeks ago when he had a fall.

"He really was declining for some time," she said, "but never mentally."

Although her father did much to improve patient care during his tenure at the state hospital, he is best known for inviting the makers of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" to the hospital campus in 1974-75.

Brooks was the technical advisor for the Academy Award-winning film and even had a speaking part, playing the role of Dr. Spivey, the psychiatrist who performed the intake interview with Randle McMurphy, played by Jack Nicholson.

Most of that scene was improvised by Nicholson — including his swatting of an imaginary fly, asking about a fishing photo and discussing his rape conviction — and Brooks' reactions were authentic.

“You never knew what Jack was going to do,” Brooks said in a December 2011 interview with the Statesman Journal.

Nicholson also flicked cigarette ashes on Brooks and wiped them off, but that didn't make the cut.

“A lot of people, the first thing they think of is the movie,” Roberts said. “I don't want to say it's a shame, but it's not at all what Dean should be remembered for. He was a tremendous advocate for patients, he was a model as a superintendent and a psychiatrist and a human being.”