

# Remembering James P. McEntee (1931 - 2004)

By Brad Yamauchi

On May 7, 2010, I attended the ceremony to dedicate the James P. McEntee, Sr. Plaza and its Legacy Art Project in the Santa Clara County Building at Hedding and First Street in San Jose. Many speakers reflecting the ethnic, religious, political and community diversity of California honored the man and his legacy. Jim brought disparate people together to talk and work toward mutual respect and human dignity. We again mourned his passing as we had at his memorial service in 2004, but then we celebrated his life in his Plaza within a forest of trees between the County buildings.

Jim McEntee was my first boss in my first attorney job in 1976. As the recently named Executive Director of the Santa Clara Co Human Relations Commission, he hired me and gave me free reign to investigate and resolve employment discrimination complaints and organize Commission hearings on varied subjects such as police violence in minority neighborhoods and racial segregation in school districts.

He allowed me to work with the Asian Law Alliance (ALA) as one of its founders and first licensed attorney. He was instrumental in securing County funding for ALA that continues to this day. At the ALA I represented indigent and low income Asians in divorce, employment, criminal and government benefits cases. It was the best of times in the life of a civil rights lawyer who is a social worker at heart. Jim McEntee not only encouraged my work to help others who have no power or money to seek justice, but as I found out more about him, it became very clear that he walked the walk and talked the talk and led by example. He was the only person I ever knew that was so pure of heart and purpose that just thinking of him now brings tears to my eyes.

He was a Roman Catholic Priest, but left the church to marry Ann, a nun, and they adopted at least 12 children of all races, some with disabilities, ranging from infants to teenagers. All their children are now successful in their careers, and they also carry on Jim and Ann's values on the strength in diversity, peace, community and faith. Faith not only in the religious sense, but faith in believing that people will help others in need and that as long as we do so, we will survive and evolve toward a happier and more secure world.

Helping others in need can manifest itself in countless ways. Each of us can do so as part of our profession, our family, our community or as a friend, and most of all as a stranger who becomes a friend.

As the inscription on "our" bench reads, "Jim, Thank You For Helping Us To Help Others." I hope this will encourage you to do the same.