



Former Huntsville City Councilwoman Sandra Moon dies of pancreatic cancer (updated)



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[HUNTSVILLE, Alabama](#) - Sandra Moon, who represented southeast Huntsville on the City Council from 1998 to 2010 and made history as the council's first female president, died at her home Tuesday evening.

Moon, 66, had recently been diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer.

Known for her sharp wit and tell-it-like-it-is candor, Moon was one of the Rocket City's most popular figures during her dozen years on the council. While political observers touted her as a potential candidate for mayor, Moon was content representing District 3. And voters in southeast Huntsville were content with Moon, re-electing her the first time with nearly 70 percent of the vote. She didn't even draw a challenger in the 2006 election.

Moon retired from politics in 2010, but not from public service. She was an active member of several boards, including the Von Braun Center and ALS Association of Alabama, and had been tapped to chair a volunteer committee working on a new southeast Huntsville branch library.

In making her goodbyes last week, one of Moon's first calls was to Madison County Commissioner Phil Riddick - to apologize for not being able to fulfill her commitment to the library committee.

"I think what made Sandra so incredibly effective is that she was genuinely a public servant," said Jennie Robinson, south Huntsville's school board member and one of Moon's closest friends.

"She had no aspiration for anything other than to serve and make a difference," said Robinson, "and she did it with all her heart and soul."

Moon was managing the local Mental Health Association chapter in 1998 when she decided to try her hand at politics. Her bruising campaign against then-District 3 Councilman Ken Arnold remains the most expensive council race in Huntsville history.

Most of Moon's \$105,000 in campaign contributions came from ice skating enthusiasts, including Intergraph co-founder Keith Schonrock and his wife, Betty, concerned about ice hockey supporters gaining control of the board that manages the city-owned Benton H. Wilcoxon Municipal Ice Complex. Moon's husband was caught in the middle as the facility's executive director and resigned a month before the election.

"Ken Arnold will probably go to his grave thinking I bought the election," Moon said in an October 2010 interview with *The Times*. "But the only thing (the Schonrocks) ever asked of me was to look at all sides and make as smart a decision as possible, and to look after citywide interests and not just District 3."

During her 12 years on the council, Moon cast an estimated 20,000 votes. But her favorite council moments were seldom front-page news.

She said she was proud to help "carry the water" to get a city-owned skateboard park built downtown in 2001. Moon also pushed to give community development officials the power to clean up swimming pools filled with smelly, stagnant water.

And she was a vocal supporter of a dangerous pet ordinance adopted in 2009 that allows Huntsville animal control officers to investigate reported dog bites and haul the owners into court. Moon got behind the issue after two pit bulls attacked a legally blind teenager out for a walk.

Bill Kling, who served alongside Moon on the City Council, said Moon was his "best friend and closest ally" when it came to neighborhood issues. He said he'll always be grateful to Moon for voting to put the Huntsville Police Department's west precinct in the Lowe Mill area rather than Cummings Research Park.

"She stuck up for the neighborhood because Lowe Mill needed a shot in the arm," Kling said.

Moon made headlines in 2000 as the first female council president. But Kling said it was no token gesture by the four male council members.

"It wasn't like we were trying to make history," he said. "We elected her because of her qualifications, the fact that she would preside over the meetings in a good fashion and represent the city well. I just had a very high respect for her."

Former Redstone Arsenal Garrison Commander John Olshefski, who replaced Moon as southeast Huntsville's council member, said transitions of power in the military can be awkward. But he said Moon, married to a retired Army colonel, handled the handoff with grace.

"It was the easiest transition I ever had because she was so open and candid," said Olshefski. "She mentored me on a few things. She was also able to help me with the political workmanship inside City Hall."

Not all of Moon's positions as a council member were popular. She cast the lone dissenting vote on a funding plan to upgrade base housing for Army generals on Redstone Arsenal.

The housing move is credited with helping Huntsville during the BRAC process. Moon said she agreed with the need but opposed using state transportation money.

In August 2005, Moon cast the deciding vote to ban smoking in most Huntsville restaurants.

"I knew it was the right thing from a public health perspective," she said in the 2010 interview. "But I had a real problem intruding on private enterprise. I'm a less-government-is-best-government kind of person."

Moon, whose maiden name was Starr, often joked that it was destiny that a Starr would marry a Moon.

Updated to reflect that Moon was 67.

Updated April 10 at 4:47 p.m. to correct Moon's age from 67 to 66.

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