Valley Fever trailblazer’s love of Bakersfield, people remembered by physicians, patients

Valley Fever pioneer remembered Saturday not only for his great contributions to treating the little-known disease, but for his deep love of people and humanity toward everyone he met.

Bakersfield Valley Fever pioneer Dr. Hans Einstein was remembered Saturday not only for his great contributions to treating the little-known disease, but for his deep love of people and humanity toward everyone he met.

Cardiologist Tommy Lee recalled the words of wisdom Einstein shared with him late one night when the cardiologist was leaving Bakersfield Memorial Hospital in despair after treating a challenging heart attack patient. “The greatest mistake,’ (Einstein) said, ‘in the treatment of disease is that there are physicians for the body and physicians for the soul, although the two cannot be separated,’” Lee told the audience.

Other physicians, patients, family and friends gathered at the Kern County Museum following the second annual Valley Fever awareness walk to celebrate Einstein’s life and long career. He died at the age of 89 on Aug. 11, 2012, the day of the first Valley Fever walk.

Late on Saturday morning, the crowd of about 175 people applauded stories of Einstein’s warmth and knowledge as they sat in white folding chairs around tables decorated with dahlias and bowls of black licorice candies, a favorite of Einstein. His five daughters mingled throughout the crowd.
Before speakers shared tales of Einstein’s major accomplishments and everyday kindness, singers serenaded the gathering with big band tunes and guests helped themselves to bright pink and green ice cream bars. Photos of his life were displayed along with his worn medical bag and customized “Cocci” license plate - Valley Fever is also known as coccidioidomycosis.

Ann Einstein, Einstein’s oldest daughter, said her father adored Bakersfield, even the infamous heat.

“He’d always say, ‘Oh it cools down in the evening,’” she said. “He loved the people. He embraced it all and they embraced him.”

Bookmarks lying on tables throughout the lawn featured a picture of Einstein smiling and the declaration, “I just love this town!”

Though Einstein’s influence reached around the world, his personal touch was renowned throughout Bakersfield. Deane Hisey, 85, said the doctor diagnosed her son Michael Hisey with Valley Fever and eventually treated the whole family.

“He started with Michael and he inherited all of us,” she said.

Einstein tried a variety of new treatments on Michael for a decade until the young man died at the age of 23, Hisey said. Her son’s battle with Valley Fever was horrible, but Einstein’s care was wonderful, she said. The physician called from New York once when Michael was ill and sent cards to the young man when Einstein traveled to Japan.

“He never refused a phone call, he came out to the house anytime we needed,” Hisey said.

The first speakers to laud Einstein as the memorial program began were prominent doctors in the Valley Fever realm, who paid homage to all they learned from Einstein. Dr. John Galgiani, Director of the Valley Fever Center for Excellence at the University of Arizona said he consulted Einstein for advice as recently as last year.

As he praised Einstein, Galgiani also commended Kern County denizens for their drive to support Valley Fever vaccine research and Einstein’s role in propelling them. Though cost has slowed vaccine efforts, great progress has been made and supporters should not be discouraged, Galgiani said.
“You hit walls and you climb over them and keep going,” Galgiani said. ”I think that was (Einstein’s) attitude, and I think that’s what our attitude should be to respect him.”

About This Series
This project results from a new venture – the Reporting On Health collaborative – which involves the Bakersfield Californian, the Merced Sun-Star, Radio Bilingüe in Fresno, The Record in Stockton, Valley Public Radio in Fresno and Bakersfield, Vida en el Valle in Fresno, the Voice of OC in Santa Ana and ReportingonHealth.org. The collaborative is an initiative of The California Endowment Health Journalism Fellowships at the University of Southern California’s Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism.

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