

Mary (Etchemendy) Guccini

1930-2023



Mary Ann Etchemendy Guccini passed away peacefully August 13th 2023 from natural causes. She was 93 years old, a lifelong resident of Fruita, Colorado and a breast cancer survivor.

Mary was the youngest of three children born to Martin Etchemendy and Jeanne Marie Hauscarriague who came to the United States from the French region of the Basque country. Her parents settled in Eureka, Nevada where Mary was born. With three young children, the family moved to Elko, Nevada where Mary attended elementary school through the fifth grade. In 1941, Mary was sent to live with her aunt Margaret Oyharcabal in Fruita, Colorado. She continued her education in Fruita graduating from Fruita Union High School in 1948. She graduated from Mesa Junior College two years later.

Shortly after Mary arrived in Colorado, Margaret Oyharcabal opened the Fruita Café in 1942 which she owned and operated until 1970 when she retired. Located on the corner of S. Mesa Street and S. Circle Park Square, the cafe was open six days a week. When Mary started working at the Fruita State Bank she would take her lunch time to work at the café helping Margaret and her small crew serve the busy lunch crowd. The restaurant closed nightly at 9:30 and Mary and Margaret would count the days earnings, clean and prepare for the next day. When the Fruita Café closed in 1970, Mary and Aunt Margaret built their first house together on Mulberry Street after having lived in a small apartment behind the restaurant for 28 years.

Mary's career in banking began as an assistant cashier at the fledgling Fruita State Bank founded in 1946. In addition to her cashier duties, Mary became associated with the Western Range Association whose purpose was to streamline immigration procedures for sheepherders to enter the United States. Mary was instrumental in processing the legal paperwork for Basque sheepherders and making travel arrangements to get them to the United States. Upon their arrival she introduced them not only to local ranchers and sheep producers but to agricultural employers throughout several Western States, particularly Colorado, Utah and Nevada.

Today, there is a National Monument dedicated to the Basque Sheepherder in Reno, Nevada. The 22-foot-tall sculpture is located in a complex that once was a sheep range tended by Basque sheepherders. Mary was a force in funding the sculpture and her name can be seen on the engraved stone below the statue.

In 1969, Mary was installed as regional vice president of the Rocky Mountain Region of the National Association of Bank Women, Inc., based in San Francisco. Her duties included representing women in banking from Colorado, Wyoming, Utah and New Mexico at meetings of the NABW across the country. Mary traveled extensively across the United States as a featured speaker to this professional organization of over 6,000 women. Other accolades included the appointment of Mary to represent the Fruita State Bank at the 50-year anniversary celebration of the Colorado National Monument in 1961.

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Mary's career with the Fruita State Bank lasted until 1977. On October 8, 1977, she married Arthur F. Guccini. They celebrated their new life together only for a short while until Arthur died in 1985. Mary began working at the Grand Valley Bank in 1995, retiring in 2010. Mary was 80 years old when she retired.

In addition to her banking career, Mary was engaged in the Fruita community. She was an active member of the Sacred Heart Catholic Church. Mary served on the Parish Finance Committee and the Parish Council. She was a commentator and a lector and ready to help in the kitchen, serving dinners or wherever help was needed. At age 20, Mary became a member of the Fruita Chamber of Commerce. She was a member for 36 years. She was also a member of the Lower Valley Business Women and she served on the Lower Valley Hospital Board for 11 years through the mid-70's and '80's. During her tenure, she spearheaded the development of a low-income housing project in Fruita. Mary also contributed to the building of Family Health West Hospital. Originally known as the Lower Valley Hospital, founded and built by Fruita residents, Mary dedicated her time on the LVHB to preserving the history of the hospital while advocating for quality medical care in Fruita. Because of her time and contributions to the betterment of the Fruita community, Mary shared the honor of being the Grand Marshall of the Fruita Fall Festival in 1986.

Mary is survived by stepdaughter Treena Marie Luchetta, numerous step grandchildren and two nephews. She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers, Aunt Margaret Oyharcabal, husband Arthur F. Guccini and stepson Thomas Arthur Guccini.

A Funeral Mass will be celebrated at Sacred Heart Parish in Fruita Saturday, August 19th at 10 a.m. A Rosary will be said at 7:00 p.m. Friday, August 18th with a viewing from 6:00-7:00 p.m. Burial will be at Elmwood Cemetery immediately following the Mass. After the burial, a luncheon will be hosted by Sacred Heart in the Parish Hall. Callahan-Edfast Mortuary is in charge of arrangements. Memorial contributions may be made to the Sacred Heart Parish building fund or to Catholic Outreach.

Fond memories and expressions of sympathy may be shared at www.callahan-edfast.com for the Guccini family.