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Lucy Killea, Political Pioneer and UC San Diego Alumna, Dies at 94



The late Lucy Killea – a San Diego city councilwoman, assemblywoman and state senator– was a proud graduate of UC San Diego.

Former San Diego city councilwoman, assemblywoman and state senator Lucy Killea has died at the age of 94. She was an icon in the political world, and a respected mentor to women.

The many worlds of Killea—U.S. foreign relations, state and local government, community leadership—all intersected in her doctoral degree from the University of California San Diego.

“In addition to being an alumna of UC San Diego, Lucy Killea was also a great friend, supporter and advisor to our campus,” said

Chancellor Pradeep K. Khosla. “She was a true Triton.”

Killea earned her Ph.D. in Latin American history in 1975 after serving as the highest-ranking woman in the U.S. Intelligence Service and accompanying her husband, U.S. diplomat John Killea, to a posting in Mexico. Killea—who had a strong network of friends in San Diego and Tijuana—had a keen interest in the cross-border region.

Two years after earning her doctorate, she joined the San Diego City Council. In 1982, she was elected to the State Assembly. From 1989 to 1996, she served in the State Senate and distinguished herself as an independent and conscientious legislator. But she never enjoyed the trappings of office. “Whenever anybody called me ‘Senator,’ I felt as though I should be wearing a toga,” she had said. “It’s not who you are; it’s who you represent.”

After the Senate, Killea spent five years as president and CEO of the philanthropic International Community Foundation. She was also active in California Forward, a project backed by five major foundations that aims to untangle the state’s dysfunctional government.

Of the many organizations she served, Killea had a special affection for her alma mater. She watched UC San Diego evolve over the years, and she and her husband counted founding Chancellor Herbert York and his wife Sybil, and second Chancellor John Gailbraith and his wife Laura, as close friends.

Killea was recognized as one of 50 alumni honorees as part of the university's 50th anniversary in 2010. She was a founding, 20-year member of the International Advisory Board for the UC San Diego School of Global Policy and Strategy, and served on the Campaign Steering Committee for UC San Diego, the Preuss School UCSD Board of Directors and the UC San Diego Board of Overseers (today called the Chancellor's Advisory Board) under both Chancellor Robert Dynes as well as Chancellor Marye Anne Fox.

Dynes remembers her well. "I first met Lucy when she was a state senator and I was chancellor. I made contacts with state and federal politicians with whom I could honestly communicate," he said. "Lucy was a true friend of UC San Diego and was constantly looking for ways to help. 'Bob, how can I help you?' were the first words that came out of her and she followed through many, many times.

"She was a truly remarkable woman who was committed to making lives better," Dynes added.

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