

Fitness Pioneer Jack LaLanne, dies at 96

Silver Circle 1991 - Gold Circle 2002



By **Matthai Kuruwila, Demian Bulwa**, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Jack LaLanne, the Bay Area native whose gospel of fitness stretched 75 years and changed the way Americans thought about working out and eating right, died on January 23, 2011 at his home in Morro Bay (San Luis Obispo County). He was 96.

The Godfather of Fitness died of respiratory failure due to pneumonia, his family said.

"It's kind of a shock," said his nephew, **Thomas LaLanne** of Mill Valley. "I didn't think Jack was ever going to die. He would tell people, 'I can't die. It'll ruin my image.' "

Mr. LaLanne started his career with an Oakland gym in 1936 - a time when athletes weren't supposed to lift weights and women weren't supposed to exercise - and went on to host the longest-running fitness show on television.

He licensed his name to two fitness clubs, wrote exercise books, made videos, gave lectures and marketed a juice machine. He was an incessant pitchman, using a drill sergeant's bark and cadence.

"Other people work at dying," he told *The Chronicle* in 2004. "I work at living!"

Former Gov. **Arnold Schwarzenegger**, the world's most famous bodybuilder, said it was Mr. LaLanne who made exercise a goal for the common man and woman.

Schwarzenegger introduced Mr. LaLanne when he was inducted into the California Hall of Fame in 2008, saying he "inspired millions and millions of people and helped create the modern fitness craze with his living example, that staying active and eating right is truly the fountain of youth."

Mr. LaLanne's fitness quest inspired the public as well as his family. His grand-nephew, **Chris LaLanne** of Castro Valley, opened LaLanne Fitness in San Francisco 2 1/2 years ago, and five months ago named his son Jackson.

"Jack's been an inspiration to me my whole life," Chris LaLanne said Sunday. "His mission in life was to help people help themselves."

Mr. LaLanne was born in San Francisco on Sept. 26, 1914, to French immigrants. They lived in Berkeley, where Mr. LaLanne described himself as a skinny, pimply kid addicted to sugar.

His behavioral problems were extreme. He attacked his brother, attempted suicide and tried to burn down his house. His overweight father died of a heart attack at 50.

I was "a miserable goddamn kid," Mr. LaLanne told *The Chronicle*. "It was like hell."

In 1936, he opened Jack LaLanne's Physical Culture Studio in Oakland. Business was slow, so Mr. LaLanne offered massages to get people in the door. Once they started weight lifting, he would suggest routines and call them on the phone if they missed two or more workouts.

"How am I gonna help you if you're not here?" he would ask.

In 1951, he started a live exercise show on KGO-TV in San Francisco. The *Jack LaLanne Show* went national in 1959 and ran for 34 years in the United States and Europe.

Mr. LaLanne became known for great feats of strength. At 40, he towed a 2,000-pound cabin cruiser as he swam the Golden Gate Channel. When he was 42, he did a record 1,033 pushups in 23 minutes.

When he was 60, Mr. LaLanne swam from Alcatraz to Fisherman's Wharf - while handcuffed, shackled and towing a boat.

Late in life, Mr. LaLanne remained fit and righteous for his cause.

"Would you give your dog a cigarette and a doughnut for breakfast every morning?" he shouted at a *Chronicle* reporter in 2004. "People think nothing of giving themselves that for breakfast, and they wonder why they don't feel good."

Mr. LaLanne is survived by his wife, **Elaine**; a daughter, **Yvonne LaLanne** of Walnut Creek; a son, **Jon LaLanne** of Kauai, Hawaii; and a stepson, **Dan Doyle** of Los Angeles.