

Lee County developer remembered as 'builder of the community'

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Van Ray Groce Sr. wasn't just a builder of homes, but a builder of the community.

That is how one of Lee County's most prominent developers will be remembered, according to local residents.

Mr. Groce, 83, died Saturday at his home after a 52-year career developing residential and commercial properties and establishing multiple neighborhoods in the county.

"Van was certainly one of the people in this community who will be a part of our history," said Bob Joyce, senior director of Business Retention and Expansion for the Sanford Area Growth Alliance.

"He was definitely a builder of our community. And not just in the sense of a contractor," he said.

Sanford Mayor Chet Mann knew Mr. Groce and his family as friends and through business dealings as a mortgage lender.

"Hopefully, they will remember that Mr. Groce was one of the first movers in Lee County and Sanford," Mr. Mann said.

Mr. Groce was one of the first builders in the county to offer affordable and subsidized housing area, the mayor said, and developed many neighborhoods in the early growth of the area.

Mr. Joyce agreed.

"He didn't build very large homes. He built homes for the average person," Mr. Joyce said. "He did a really good job of building neighborhoods with affordable homes."

“He was always a gentleman and a fine person and raised a great family,” Mr. Mann said. “He was active in his church and gave back to the community.”

Mr. Groce served as a member of the Lee County Board of Commissioners from 1995 to 1996 and attended Jonesboro Methodist Church.

Mr. Groce “had a good vision of the future and where things were going,” Mr. Joyce said. “He did a lot of jobs in the community. He will be missed in that sector of the community.”

Mr. Mann said he was grateful for Mr. Groce’s contributions to the community through the years.

“He was a worker,” Mr. Mann said. “He didn’t sit around.”

A complete obituary for Mr. Groce including survivors and funeral arrangements can be found on PAGE A3.