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Former Councilman Dies

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Former Burbank city councilman Ted McConkey died in Burbank Dec 23. McConkey, one of the more controversial elected officials to serve in recent decades, served a single term that began in May, 1995. But it was one term that followed years of activism, and one that will long be remembered for a remarkable series of accomplishments and stunning scandals.

McConkey lost his bid for reelection in 1999, defeated by David Laurell. Laurell's unofficial campaign slogan was "Plays well with others," a thinly disguised reference to McConkey's notorious reputation for cantankerous behavior, often while leveling scandalous allegations, including charges of corruption and other felonious conduct, against virtually anyone who disagreed with his positions. McConkey lost in a run off election by almost 1,200 votes.

McConkey's campaign slogan for 1995 and 1999 was "honesty and integrity," and his losing bid for reelection was in part the result of a series of discoveries revealing McConkey had all along hidden away at least as many skeletons in his character closet as those concealed by the city officials he'd hounded for years. Among those was a revelation from his own family announcing that, 30 years earlier in a small Michigan town, the man we knew as an activist, gadfly and then councilman had abandoned his wife, Elizabeth "Betty" McConkey, and their three sons. In the company of a woman who worked at a local college, he effectively vanished from the face of the earth.

It wasn't until Ted held office that an internet search saw McConkey's brother Eugene finally locate him in Burbank, living with the same woman he'd disappeared with decades before.

There's no question I was an early fan of McConkey's, both of his blunt talk and of his claimed vision for city government. But once he took office – this after I'd written a column trumpeting McConkey's pledge that City Hall shouldn't dread his



Ted McConkey in 1995

arrival – it became clear he couldn't approach meeting the standards for honesty and forthrightness that he demanded of others.

Even on the sacred issue of debate over airport expansion, McConkey invoked a double standard. He had long railed against city officials taking part in "secret" meetings on the issue, which were defined as any session that had any city official discussing the issue when the public was not permitted to watch. McConkey's harsh criticism of those meetings vanished the first time he was asked to sit in for another official who could not attend.

I'll write more about McConkey's record in and out of office in several days. But I'm presently out of town, and only offered this brief report upon realizing the Burbank Leader and Daily News apparently had yet to even learn of the former councilman's death almost a week later. In fact, and ironically, according to city officials I've spoken to in recent days, reporters have contacted them in recent days, but only in the course of developing a feature story that will declare Councilman David Gordon, a McConkey acolyte, Burbank's "News Maker" of the year.

Also prominent among McConkey's supporters were Phil and Carolyn Berlin, the husband and wife team now running themselves for city council.
