Jerry Juhl for the Arts His Quirky Sense of Humor Inspired the Caspar Community

If you "google" Jerry Juhl, you will find pages of listings and, after reading just a few, you will realize what an exceptional man Jerry was and how fortunate we are that he and his wife Susan chose the Mendocino County community of Caspar as their home.

So much has been written about Jerry's professional life, it is impossible to summarize it in a meaningful way. Suffice it to say that Jerry started playing with puppets as a small child and never stopped. His brand of silliness touched millions of lives through his work as the head writer for The Muppet Show, Fraggle Rock and as co-writer of the Muppet Movie, among many other things.

Jerry and Susan did not move to Caspar as celebrities. Instead they slipped in "under the radar" in 1987. Longtime friend and neighbor Judy Tarbell says, "Many Coasters are amazingly talented yet retiring. Most of us came here to live quietly and be left alone. One true test of our rebounding sense of community is that some of our luminaries, like Susan and Jerry, found a comfortable place to share their fascinating lives with neighbors and friends."

In 1997 when people in Caspar initiated meetings about the future of Caspar, Jerry and Susan were intensely involved in the process. Judy remembers, "The Juhls were among the first to recognize the magic of a Caspar Community Center and were instrumental in making its acquisition possible."

Nothing puts Jerry's quirky sense of humor in context better than gorse, an invasive, highly flammable shrub that has invaded Caspar. Three weeks after the Juhls moved to Caspar, a horrifying gorse fire swept into the field adjoining their house. "It's an interesting way to meet the neighbors," Judy remembers the Juhls saying after the fire was extinguished by multiple fire departments.

This introduction to the Caspar gorse fields took root in Jerry's imagination. Judy recounts, "Jerry conceived a gorse monster, created by him and sculptor Tom Brown, to lead an annual Caspar Halloween Parade. Jerry led the parade in his top hat and cape, carrying a sign: Beware Gorse Monster. Be Afraid. Be Very Afraid! He thought if we appeased the gorse monster by allowing it to lead the parade, maybe it would leave us alone." Judy concludes, "His kindness, community spirit and sense of humor were a gift to Caspar that was consistent and enduring."

Jerry and Susan's support of local artists and arts organizations has been manifested in countless ways. One of those is through a fund at the Community Foundation: The Jerry Juhl Fund for the Arts. Initially the fund will provide for scholarships for Mendocino and Fort Bragg high school students who are pursuing careers in the performing arts, including music, dance, theatre, film, and puppetry.