

# Revered Sequoia drama teacher succumbs to cancer

Web site fills up with fond memories of late theater coach

By T.S. Mills-Faraudo

STAFF WRITER

SAN CARLOS — Beloved former Sequoia High School drama teacher John Raymond Doherty, usually called "Ray" by friends and family, died Friday after a short battle with cancer. He was 71.

Doherty, who taught theater and English at Sequoia for 37 years, was stern with his students but always had a way of bringing out the best in them, wife Joanne Engelhardt said.

In his final days, a Web site titled WeloveRay.com was started on which hundreds of messages from former students and friends were posted to Doherty and his family. Messages are continuing to pour in with favorite memories about Doherty.

"It's taken a life of its own," Engelhardt said of the Web site. "People just keep adding stuff."

It was Doherty's zest for life and sense of humor that touched so many people who knew him, she said.

For example, a former neighbor told her that she was inspired to volunteer for the American Cancer Society when she heard Doherty spent eight years offering to drive cancer patients to their doctor appointments.

"He spent his life teaching and inspiring people, and he's still doing it," she said.

Class of 1990 Sequoia graduate Frank Bravo fondly remembers Doherty's list of signature lines that his students called "Ray-isms."

"Like if a student said, 'Why don't we do a scene this way?' He would say,

'Go get your own show.'" Bravo said.

"If we were doing scenes together and we had to choose a partner, he would say, 'God gives you your relatives; thank God you can choose your partners.'"

Born on Jan. 25, 1936, Doherty, the son of William E. Doherty and Aileen



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Egan, was raised in San Francisco, where he attended St. Cecilia's Elementary School, St. Ignatius High School and the University of San Francisco.

After receiving his teaching degree, Doherty started his first job at Sequoia High School on Sept. 9, 1959, and on that same day, his first child, William, was born. He had all of his children with his first wife, Jacklyn Radley.

During his time as Sequoia's drama teacher, Doherty would direct as many as six productions a year. Even after he retired in 1996, he returned to teach drama two years later on an interim basis when another teacher resigned.

The San Carlos resident directed and performed in a number of community theater productions. His last performance was in Pacifica Spindrift Players' December production of the comedy, "Mrs. Bob Cratchit's Wild Christmas Binge," in which he played Marley's Ghost.

Engelhardt said Doherty was known for his quick wit when he was in a show. For example, if someone messed up in a show, he always had a way of minimizing it with his performance.

After a divorce from his first wife, Doherty met Engelhardt in the early 1980s through a mutual friend. They

were married on Aug. 26, 1989, on the Hillbarn Theatre stage, amid the scenery and props for "Brighton Beach Memoirs." Even the invitation had a theater theme. It looked like a play ticket and said: "Ray Doherty and Joanne Engelhardt, Starring in 'Happily Ever After.'"

Doherty is survived by his wife, Joanne Engelhardt; children William Doherty of Santa Clara, Elizabeth Donelan of Pacifica, John Doherty of Redwood City and Patricia Hevey of Redwood City; and grandchildren Ian, Rylan, Victoria and Lindsay Doherty, Paige Hevey and Samantha Modeste. His grandson Nickolas Modeste died of cancer when he was 14.

A memorial service is being planned for some time in May at Sequoia High's Carrington Hall. Updates can be found on WeloveRay.com.