**JOHN PULLING**

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[**http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2005/Apr/19/ndn\_business\_leader\_john\_pulling\_sr\_\_dies/?print=1**](http://www.naplesnews.com/news/2005/Apr/19/ndn_business_leader_john_pulling_sr__dies/?print=1)

**Business leader John Pulling Sr. dies** ERIC STAATS, [emstaats@naplesnews.com](mailto:emstaats@naplesnews.com) Tuesday, April 19, 2005

John Pulling Sr., a Naples original and the namesake of Airport-Pulling Road, has died. He was 89.

Pulling was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1915, coming to Naples for winter stays at a house near the beach on Broad Avenue South when he was only a toddler.

He moved here permanently when he was 19, seeking a warm and humid climate to help him recover from a debilitating back condition. Pulling died Sunday of complications from a back fracture, his son John "Alec" Pulling Jr. said Monday.

Pulling was one of Collier County's most prolific land investors, buying and selling thousands of acres that now bear names like Lake Park, Seagate, Lely Estates, Stonebridge and the J&C Industrial Park north of Pine Ridge Road.

More than that, though, Pulling embraced the sleepy town's future growth explosion before most people could imagine it happening, his friends and family said.

"If you live in Naples, you can thank Dad," the younger Pulling said Monday.

Pulling became one of the county's most important business leaders and a force to be reckoned with in local politics, almost always behind the scenes.

"If anything was going on and it involved real estate in Naples' early days, he was right in the middle of it, but you'd never know it," said his friend Ben Parks, one-time Naples city attorney.

"He was one of a kind," Parks said. "They don't make them like that anymore."

Parks' office on Fifth Avenue South is not far from one of Pulling's first business endeavors: a tavern, known as Club 41, at the northwest corner of Fifth Avenue and U.S. 41.

One day, Pulling and another man decided to liven up a quiet day in Naples by building a bonfire out of old boxes in the middle of the intersection in front of the bar, Pulling recalled in an interview with the Naples Daily News in 2003.

"We sat there for a couple hours, burning up the damnedest bonfire you ever saw in your life and not a goddam soul come through the intersection, not the first person," Pulling said.

In 1945, another man walked into the bar and offered to buy out Pulling, who was growing tired of the bar business. Pulling quickly agreed.

"I turned around and walked out of the bar and never came back," Pulling said in 2003.

He went on to get his real estate license and co-founded the Naples Real Estate Exchange in offices on Fifth Avenue. He helped start the Naples Area Board of Realtors in 1948.

In 1970, Pulling bought Temple Citrus groves, which operates a retail store and fruit-shipping operation along Airport-Pulling Road north of Pine Ridge Road.

He spent parts of every day there, Pulling Jr. said. The building doubles as a gallery for Pulling's collection of photographs of life in Naples in the first half of the 20th century.

Parks remembers trips Pulling took to Everglades City, then the county seat, to talk to county commissioners about his vision for the county's future. Sometimes it took more than talk.

In the 1950s, Pulling was trying to persuade county leaders to build an extension of what is now Pine Ridge Road. Back then, it stopped at about Goodlette-Frank Road.

He hired a bulldozer to cut an east-west path through the woods, and along the edge of his land, turning north at the end. He took county leaders up in a plane to show them his work, and they agreed to finish the job. The northern stretch is now Airport-Pulling Road.

Pulling also took matters into his own hands when he built part of the island that U.S. 41 crosses as it bridges the Gordon River.

He was among the first to recognize the need to plan for water and sewer service in Naples, said former City Manager Richard Woodruff.

Woodruff, who grew up in Naples, said Pulling used his land holdings, not only for his benefit, but as a chance to contribute something to the community.

"Anybody who didn't know John Pulling missed a chance to know someone who had a very significant role in the history of Naples," Woodruff said.

The city's police station, sewer plant and several municipal buildings sit on land along Goodlette Road that once belonged to Pulling.

In the 2003 interview, Pulling said he donated some of the land to the city and sold the rest at below-market prices.

He remembered leasing some of his land along Goodlette Road to the city for $1 a year for a garbage dump that later became the city's horticultural landfill.

That land has been the site of a high-profile falling out between Pulling and city leaders in recent years.

In 2001, Pulling came close to withdrawing an offer to donate 7 acres along the Gordon River after planning for the park got stalled by city concerns about Pulling's conditions that part of the park be reserved for boat trailers and for an easement for a possible second bridge over the river. The City Council eventually agreed to both conditions.

At about the same time, Pulling was at odds with the city over developer Phil McCabe's plans to build a hotel on another piece of Pulling's riverfront property. The City Council has since approved plans to build an enclave of townhouses and condos there.

Mayor Bill Barnett said he was saddened by the news of Pulling's death and praised Pulling as an example of "the real Naples."

"He cared about Naples and he cared about what was happening to it," Barnett said. "He'll be missed."

Pulling could be gruff at times, but that rough exterior belied a soft heart, said Pulling Jr. "He was always looking for the good parts in people," he said.

Pulling is survived by his wife, Carol, five children and nine grandchildren. In lieu of flowers, his family suggests a donation to Liberty Youth Ranch, a planned shelter in Lee County for abused, abandoned and orphaned children.

Services are at 1 p.m. Thursday at First Presbyterian Church, 250 Sixth St. S., in Naples.

Longtime friend Darold Greek said Pulling leaves a gap in Naples that nobody will be able to fill.

"He knew more about this town than anyone else," Greek said. "Now he's gone."