E.V. pioneer Morrison set the bar high


Marvin Morrison, one of the pioneers of a region renowned for its mobility, spent his life making his hometown and its neighboring communities the kind of places that residents, businesses and educators would want to invest their assets and themselves in.

Morrison, who died Monday at age 83, would have been an exemplary Gilbert resident if he hadn’t done anything beyond turning 2,400 acres of desert into a hugely profitable farm, beginning in the 1940s; his collaboration with his brother Kenneth, wife June, and their respective families helped establish the town as an agricultural hub.

But he did so much more. He was connected to the community and state, found out what they needed to become what he felt they should be, and took action. He sat on Gilbert’s school board, Arizona’s first atomic energy commission, his church’s administrative board and just about every other committee he could think of.

He earned degrees at Arizona State University when well past “traditional” age, and a grant from the family’s farming fortune spurred ASU’s Morrison Institute for Public Policy, which has churned out research with statewide implications since it became Arizona’s first think tank in 1982.

As Gilbert and Mesa development submerged the Morrisons’ holdings in the area, Marvin and subsequent generations made it clear they were in it for an even longer haul, thoughtfully steering the design of the neighborhoods now springing up on Morrison Ranch, rather than simply cashing out.

The Web site for the Morrison School of Agribusiness and Management, the ASU Polytechnic department named in honor of Marvin and June in 1998 after they donated a large tract of farmland, says Marvin often quoted an American Indian proverb that “a man is not measured by what he has, but what he gives away."

We all owe it to his legacy to give the same quality of care and feeding to our own corners of the East Valley.