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George T. Potter, ex-Ramapo College president, 81

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BY JAY LEVIN

The Record

STAFF WRITER

George T. Potter, the founding president of Ramapo College, who helped plan the school's campus on the former Birch estate in Mahwah, died Oct. 31. He was 81 and lived in Santa Barbara, Calif.

The cause was cancer, his family said.

Mr. Potter, born and educated in England, was president of Ramapo from its opening in 1969 to 1984. He was previously vice president for academic affairs at Grand Valley State University in Michigan and played a key role in planning that school prior to its opening.

Ramapo's current president, Peter P. Mercer, said Mr. Potter came to New Jersey "with quite a vision for what he wanted a liberal arts college to be."

"He had what I describe as an integrated vision predicated on the Oxford-Cambridge model of a small college, where people worked together and where there was a heavy emphasis on teaching," Mercer said.

Working with the Ramapo board, Mr. Potter mapped out the campus in the hilly reaches of northern Bergen County and designed the state school's academic structure. He taught in the School of Administration and Business after stepping down from the presidency. The campus library is named for Mr. Potter.

Mercer said Mr. Potter corresponded with other members of the founding faculty, some of whom are still on campus.

"He was enormously interested in the people and world around him, and had a real zest for life," Mercer said.

Ramapo College will mark its 40th anniversary at the annual Founders Day celebration, 4 to 7 p.m. Nov. 18 at the Bill Bradley Sports and Recreation Center. Mr. Potter would have celebrated his 82nd birthday that day. A special tribute is planned.

Mr. Potter is survived by his wife of 36 years, Laurie; two children; two stepchildren, and three grandchildren.

Memorial contributions can be made to the George T. Potter Scholarship Fund, c/o Ramapo College Foundation, 505 Ramapo Valley Road, Mahwah, NJ 07430.

E-mail: levin@northjersey.com

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