

ANSON CHONG / 1938-2008

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Former lawmaker beloved of Fern Forest

By Rod Thompson

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When former state legislator Anson Chong and his wife, Ann Gleason, moved to a poor, backwoods community on the Big Island in 1997, Chong met a woman with cancer who needed a ride to church in Hilo, some 20 miles away.

The church was Catholic and Chong was not, but he found a spiritual home there and he found a food distribution program that he persuaded the church to expand to the Fern Forest Community.

On June 7 the people of Fern Forest, knowing that he was dying of cancer, held an Anson Chong Day in his honor.

Chong died Tuesday. He was 69.

"He just really cared about people," said his cousin Danette



Anson Chong

Kong Poole. "He didn't care about what people thought about him. He wanted to get the job done. He was really out for the little person," she said.

"Fern Forest is just full of

down-and-out people, single mothers, people living in cars, buses, under tarps. He took pity on them," said his wife.

Born in Kaimuki, Chong attended Punahou School, then received a bachelor's degree in economics from Colgate University in New York. He received a master's degree in economics from Columbia University in New York and a postgraduate certificate in urban administration from Yale.

He served with the 25th Infantry Division at Schofield Barracks and then with the Peace Corps in Nigeria from 1964 to 1966. He then joined the Foreign Service, which took him to three war zones: the Middle East in 1967, Biafra-Nigeria from 1967 to 1968 and Vietnam from 1968 to 1969.

He was an aide to U.S. Sen. Daniel Inouye from 1971 to 1972.

Chong was elected to the state House of Representatives in 1972, representing Makiki. He served in the Senate from 1974 to 1980.

In 1980 he was redistricted out of office. "That was crushing. It was really crushing," said Gleason, who met him two years later and married him in 1983.

A series of jobs followed, including economic development work in Micronesia, copy editing for the Asian Wall Street Journal and teaching in various Hawaii community colleges, before "coming home" to Hawaii and Fern Forest after a period in Rochester, N.Y.

Chong ran three Honolulu Marathons. He was always recognizable by his trademark floppy felt hat.

Chong is survived by his wife and a brother, Wayson. Services are pending.