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BODY:

In a perfect world devoid of incivility, term limits and cancer, Ken Maddy would have won another election Tuesday.

In an imperfect world, his life and times were recalled with affection and questionable wit the other evening by several hundred of his closest friends, among them the requisite collection of tall cool blondes and equally cool Browns named Willie and Jerry, not to mention Pete Wilson, John Burton and Eddie Hall, an attendee who remembered the former state senator as a man of the people, important and otherwise.

Willie Brown agreed. "If he hadn't smoked dope, he'd have been governor," the San Francisco mayor told the crowd, alluding to a singular indiscretion. After that, it was pretty much all uphill at a three-hour love-in that may have both embarrassed and gratified the honoree.

His kind of party, said Don Maddy of his father, who died two weeks ago after a yearlong battle with cancer. "My dad was kind of a normal guy."

Normal, all right, if that means not having an enemy on either side of the aisle in a house that is more often than not divided. In his life, they always said Maddy was a legislator who could bring them under the same tent, left wing and right.

In death, he did it one final time, under a tent in front of a garage next door to Frank Fat's, his favorite watering hole just down the street from the Capitol and Eddie Hall's shoeshine stand where he was a regular.

"He loved to be neat, and always was," Hall, 75, said of his departed customer.

Except, recalled old chum Don Jackson, when he was on the same stage with Willie Brown. Then, no matter how natty Maddy was, he said, "he still looked like he bought his suit at Hodge and Sons."

Such a handsome lug, Pete Wilson said of the opponent who probably kept him from becoming the GOP nominee for governor in 1978, when he managed to siphon off enough moderate votes. It was a campaign in which the candidate with the leading man looks attracted such leading ladies of the media from the east as Mary McGrory and Leslie Stahl.

"By the end of the campaign," the former governor said, "I wanted to vote for him."

So did a lot of others, as state Senate President Pro Tem John Burton discovered 20 years ago when Democrats thought all they had to do was throw their hat into the district to hang on to the Fresno Assembly seat. Burton was expecting another GOP "Neanderthal." He got a "Rockford" look-alike instead.

One after another they had come to remember him, golfing partners and horse lovers, lawmaker colleagues and fraternity brothers, old pals such as John Harris, Karney Hodge, Lee Bowers and Gene Gomes, treasured assistants and secretaries such as JoAnn Slinkard and Jan DeBenedetto, and the former Beverly Chinello, the mother of his three children.

But no one said it any better than Hall. "A good man, a damn good man. No matter how busy he was, he always had the time to stop by and say hello."

As the tent emptied, he studied the crowd. "I think he's looking up – or down -- and saying, 'Good job.' Too bad he had to miss it."