



HIS LAST **RRR**
SEE A SON

Navy Veteran

Sees Seahawks win the **BIG ONE**

Homer Armstrong was a Seattle Seahawks lifer. He lived and died with their wins and losses since the day the team first took to the artificial turf at the Kingdome in 1976. His love for the team grew into season tickets while they played at the concrete Kingdome. Homer also joined the cheering, record-setting fans at CenturyLink Field, their new home, as he watched the Seahawks come to life as a championship franchise.

The former Navy Veteran possessed an infectious enthusiasm for the Seahawks, even in their non-winning seasons. Darlene, Homer's wife, dressed the kids, grandkids and even the great grandkids in Seahawks gear. They managed to convert most of them into lifelong fans of the team.

Many have cheered on the Seahawks throughout the years, some of them coming on board as fans during their most prolific season ever...the one that brought the famed 12th Man a championship. But few fans have as great a story of devotion to one team as Homer.

“But he lived for Sundays,”

He was known as a quiet, peaceful man. Friends and family described Homer as “a gentleman,” “respectful” and “kind.” His military career started in the Navy shipyards in Bremerton, Wash., where he worked as a shipfitter. Homer would later close out his professional life as a logging truck driver hauling Douglas Fir and Cedar from the heavily carpeted, virgin forests of south-central



Darlene Armstrong, Homer Armstrong and granddaughter Jaccue Netzer, decked out in their Seahawks gear.

Washington. Both of these professions provided a satisfying life, Darlene recalled. “But he lived for Sundays,” she said. “We all did.”

Whether it was attending games in his earlier years or watching from home later, as his congestive heart failure slowly strangled his ability to get around, Homer embodied the spirit of the 12th Man. The 12th Man is a concept embraced by the Seahawks' faithful that describes the fans' role as a 12th Man on the field due to their powerfully loud cheering and its impact on the game. Homer possessed that enthusiasm for the Hawks and many believed he took it a step further.

Dr. Iris Tio-Matos, a geriatric physician at the American Lake Division Community Living Center, not far

from where Homer made his home, remembers what it was like when he was first admitted as a patient to the center.

“His room became like a teenager’s,” recalled the doctor who had cared for Homer for the last 15 years. “Posters of Seahawks, their schedule, banners, stuff everywhere that was Seahawks.”

Dr. Tio-Matos knew she always could stop by Homer’s room to learn the score of the last game or the start time for the next one coming up. Other caregivers echoed those thoughts about Homer and noted he was always so positive, even in light of a Seahawks loss.

“He would say, ‘we’ll get the next one,’” said VA registered nurse Teri Hernandez, one of Homer’s caregivers. “But he was always so excited because of all the wins this year.” Hernandez didn’t come into the VA system a full-fledged Seahawk fan, but she certainly became one after spending time with Homer. As one of his consistent caregivers, Hernandez had long chats with Homer about the team. Even when the Seahawks played her beloved New Orleans Saints, she didn’t let on she was rooting for both teams. She wanted Homer feeling great about his home team.

In spite of great pain at times, Homer was in great spirits due to the Seahawks’ wins. His life was slowly slipping past, but you would never have known it.

Dr. Tio-Matos talked of the men and women of the World War II generation and how they rarely complain about anything. She said Homer never complained about his health and was the first to ask how someone else was doing.

Homer’s wife Darlene shared those sentiments and recalled that Homer could have easily protested over events in his life. He could have complained about having had to drag bodies out of the bloody water while on the beaches at Normandy, where he was first sent as a sailor. He could have been both-



Pictured left to right is Aiaga Laulu-Nichols, Ester Rosario, Kathy Hynes, Darlene Armstrong, Elaine Lowe and Teri Hernandez. This group took care of Homer in his final days.

ered about how congestive heart failure left him bound to an oxygen bottle for much of his life. But he didn’t. He instead focused on the things in life he cherished, his family and friends..... and those Seahawks.

Homer shared that joy with anyone who would listen. Homer was given a wheelchair soon after his arrival at the Community Living Center (CLC) in Tacoma, Wash. He didn’t take to it at first, but soon learned how to navigate with it. Then he was off, up and down the halls rallying the other Veterans and staff to support those Hawks.

Then came the playoff run toward the ultimate prize, to play in a Super Bowl. As 12th Man acceptance grew in the region and throughout the country, no one could have been more of a 12th Man than Homer.

“He literally couldn’t wait for the playoffs,” said Darlene. “He was so excited, you could see it in his eyes.....they would light up when you talked about it.”

The Seahawks marched through the playoffs and onto the biggest stage in



Wife of Homer Armstrong, Darlene, sits on a bench along the shore of American Lake. The Community Living Center, where Homer watched the Seahawks, sits adjacent to the lake.

American sports. On Super Bowl Sunday the CLC staff, knowing this might be one the last games Homer would see, put on a food spread worthy of the big day. Wings, sausage and of course, a cake in the shape of the Seahawks' CenturyLink Field, complete with Skittles, were enjoyed by all.

In spite of the excitement and cheering going on that day, Darlene knew something was not right. "I looked in his eyes - something was different," she said of her husband of nearly 50 years. "He was a tough old guy and didn't complain so I didn't think much of it."

With a Super Bowl win final, Homer told his wife he didn't think he would have ever lived long enough to see the Seahawks win the big game. "He was just so extremely happy about it," Darlene recalled.

The party died down and everyone made their way home. Homer went back to his Seahawks-adorned room for a night of great sleep after the satisfying win.

It was the final game for Homer. Later that night, he suffered a massive heart attack and became comatose. Family,

staff and fellow Veterans wept at losing Homer, later that morning. But they cheered his spirit and all knew he had passed after getting the win of his life.

"He waited until that game," said Dr. Tio-Matos. "He had to see that win before he went."

A four-story glass-enclosed entry is the main artery in and out of the center where Homer passed. On a non-descript Monday, staff, veterans and family lined the enormous echoing hallway for the final salute. The music of "Anchors Aweigh" drifted quietly across the still assembly.

Draped in an American flag, Homer's body was pushed down the hall. Slowly. His fellow Veterans saluted when the procession reached the gathering, and a visiting General cut the near silence with the words, "A hero has left his post." The procession continued out of the corridor and into the gray morning air.

Homer's caregiver, nurse Teri, led the way...

Waving the 12th Man flag.

HIS LAST BREATH

SCENES