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As Ka Iwi Action Council president, David Matthews worked to block a proposed parking lot at the Makapuu lookout in 2001.

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David Matthews fought Ka Iwi development

'He was what all of us aspire to be, in terms of citizen activism'

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By **Gene Park**
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Eighty-one-year-old David Matthews lost a decades-long fight against lung disease Saturday but won many other battles in his decades-long fight to protect Oahu's coastlines.

Yesterday, his friends and family gathered at Sandy Beach, an area protected from development after Matthews and his Save Sandy Beach Coalition called for a landmark voter referendum to keep it as it is now.

He was described as fierce and feisty yet kind and joyful. He wore many hats, including co-owner of a steel business in Ohio, environmental activist, outspoken left-wing figure in the Democratic Party and political button collector.

"David was a warrior with a big heart," said Phil Estermann, who co-founded the Sandy Beach coalition with Matthews in the 1980s. "Even though he'd argue with you and get riled up at times, at the end he'd give you a big hug. He was a very loving guy."

The pair met at a 1985 Hawaii Kai Neighborhood Board meeting that discussed a proposed 172-townhome development by landowner Kamehameha Schools.

Matthews' passionate protest against the development drew Estermann to him, and the two formed the landmark activist group. Reminders of its work remain in the "Save Sandy Beach" bumper stickers still clinging to older vehicles, and many shirts still being worn, including at yesterday's service.

The movement ended with the city rezoning and buying the land in question to ensure it remains undeveloped and open to the public.

"This is the last undeveloped scenic shoreline accessible to the general public," Estermann said. "It's a unique resource and David recognized that."

Matthews was involved in environmental activism as recently as last summer, when he helped block development on the Ka Iwi Coast. From a wheelchair, Matthews spoke at a rally in the city in August. Rep. Gene Ward (R, Hawaii Kai) presented a state commendation to his family for his activism.



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David Matthews was remembered at the Ka Iwi Coast yesterday by son Daryl, left, grandson Max, widow Liz, grandson Jacob and Esther Solomon. [CLICK FOR LARGE](#)

Matthews loved politics until the end, his family said. His son, 59-year-old Daryl, said one of his last conversations with his father was about politics.

"He asked me, 'So do you think (Barack) Obama is just a flash in the pan?'" Daryl said, holding a bag of political buttons his father had collected over the years.

Richard Port, national committeeman for the state Democratic Party, said Matthews' roots as a labor union worker fueled his passion for workers' rights and equality.

"He was what all of us aspire to be, in terms of citizen activism," Port said. "All of this he did without pay. No words that I can express add anything to the fundamental accomplishments David made in our community."

Ann Marie Kirk, a 43-year-old member of the Ka Iwi Coalition, said Matthews' work would continue to influence Hawaii activists in the future.

"What more inspiration do you need than that?" Kirk said. "He's a giant."

Liz Matthews called her late husband of 36 years the most honest man she had ever met, with a "handshake you can take to the bank."

Although his condition left Matthews unable to speak recently, his wife remembered that his last words were to his grandsons.

"He told them to learn, because knowledge is what's most important; to travel, because you learn when you travel," she said. "To love, because it's the best thing you'll ever learn; and to take a great big bite out of life. And that was what he did."

Canadian-born Matthews lived in Ohio until he decided to retire in Hawaii in 1984. He is survived by wife Liz, son Daryl and grandsons Max and Jacob.