

The San Diego Union-Tribune  
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## **STRUCTURAL ENGINEER MADE LANDMARK BUILDINGS QUAKE-SAFE; Charitable work was also a pillar of his life as a church leader, community volunteer**

**BYLINE:** BETH WOOD, SPECIAL TO THE U-T

Thanks to Thomas G. Atkinson, many of San Diego's structures are safer, including the Hotel del Coronado and the Mormon temple overlooking Interstate 5. Charitable organizations like the San Diego Rescue Mission are more stable because of his philanthropy and volunteer efforts.

Mr. Atkinson coupled his commitment to serve those in need with his thriving career as a structural engineer specializing in earthquake engineering.

"He was highly respected," said fellow engineer Lee Biggers. "Tom was a meticulous person, a model structural engineer and a model man."

At La Jolla Lutheran Church, Mr. Atkinson was active for decades, serving often as president of the church's Board of Elders. He was instrumental in the church's assistance to one of many Vietnamese refugee families who came to Camp Pendleton in 1976.

"Our church helped the family of pharmacist Trang Kin," recalled Pastor Dick Mattson of Idaho, who headed the congregation at the time. "The Atkinsons were remarkable in their personal involvement and encouragement of the Trangs. Tom was a constant strength. When in a leadership position, he would take charge but never in an overwhelming way, always considerate of everyone involved."

Mr. Atkinson died of heart failure on Feb. 25 in San Diego. He was 93.

Thomas George Atkinson was born Jan. 11, 1920, in South Bend, Ind. He moved with his family to Altadena in 1926 and graduated from Elliott Junior High School there. He studied two years at Pasadena City College and earned a civil engineering degree from **California Institute of Technology** in 1942.

After becoming an officer in the Navy's 4th Construction Battalion, he served in Okinawa and Guam. Mr. Atkinson remained a reserve officer until the end of World War II, attaining the rank of lieutenant commander.

On his return to California, Mr. Atkinson started his civilian engineering career. In 1948, he married Eleanor Brunzman. In 1951, during the Korean War, he was recalled and deployed to Miramar Naval Air Station to help develop the base. He and his wife moved to San Diego during that period, and Mr. Atkinson established his own company in 1953.

Mr. Atkinson was the structural engineer for many major projects, including Muir College Apartments and other UC San Diego buildings. His other prominent work includes the Mission Bay Visitors Center, Torrey Pines High School, piers, bridges and Navy structures. His expertise in earthquake engineering

was critical in the seismic retrofitting of the Hotel del Coronado and other buildings.

A founding member of the Structural Engineers Association of San Diego, he served as its president in 1971 and president of the statewide organization in 1972.

Also in the 1970s, Mr. Atkinson was appointed to the governor's panel that updated the Uniform Building Code in California to integrate earthquake design into all types of structures.

In the 1960s, Mr. Atkinson served on the board of Lakeside's Home of Guiding Hands, a residential home for the developmentally disabled. He lent his expertise to the planning and construction of its campus, which opened in 1967. He spent seven years on the San Diego Rescue Mission board, starting in 1992.

A longtime Clairemont resident, he was a San Diego Lions Club member since 1962, serving on several committees and editing the weekly newsletter.

The Boy Scouts also were important to Mr. Atkinson and his two sons, who became Eagle Scouts.

"Being a Scout was a formative experience for him as a boy," said his younger son, Daniel Atkinson of San Diego. "The Scout oath and some of the tenets of personal conduct very much influenced him, and he passed that along to us.

"If I had one word to describe him, it's integrity -- a human quality that is applied to buildings as well. Integrity as a person -- and integrity in the work he did -- were of one piece."

In addition to Daniel, Mr. Atkinson is survived by Eleanor, his wife of 64 years; his older son, David, of Dana Point; and two grandsons.

A memorial service for Mr. Atkinson will be held at La Jolla Lutheran Church at 11 a.m. March 23. Donations may be made to La Jolla Lutheran Church or San Diego Rescue Mission.



*just a note*



**Donald Jephcott**  
19191 Harvard Ave., Apt. 153C  
Irvine, CA 92612-8609

PATSY,

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TOM ATKINSON, CLASS  
OF 1962.

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WELL WITH YOU

*Don Jephcott 4/2*

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THOMAS G. ATKINSON • 1920-2013

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