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'A force of nature': Pioneering Third Ward engineer, property inspector Richard Sewing dies at 87

By **Nancy Sarnoff**, *Staff writer*

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Patricia and Richard Sewing at the Houston Medical Forum's 26th Annual Scholarship Gala. (For the Chronicle/Gary Fountain, December 4, 2015)

Gary Fountain, For the Chronicle / Gary Fountain/For the Chronicle

Richard Sewing, an architectural engineer and property inspector known for his forthright nature, playful sense of humor and deep knowledge of the inner workings of historic homes — particularly those in Houston's Third Ward — died at home on Aug. 9. He was 87.

His died on the same day the Houston Chronicle published a tribute to Sewing and Rev. William Lawson, founder of Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church, about their longtime friendship and their time marching for civil rights with Martin Luther King Jr. The story was written by Joy Sewing, his daughter and a Chronicle journalist.

"My father wasn't really the protesting type," she wrote. "His form of social justice meant getting his education, making money on his own terms and taking care of his

family.”

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On HoustonChronicle.com: [My father and the Rev. Lawson: Old friends share memories of 1960s Houston, civil rights fight](#)

That motivation drove him to launch Richard H. Sewing & Associates, an engineering and inspection company that provided structural and mechanical inspections of homes and commercial buildings, in 1987. Over more than three decades, he and his son Jon, who worked alongside him in the business, inspected thousands of homes in and around Houston. Sewing retired in January.

“He was well known and well respected,” said Houston real estate broker Gerald Womak. “All the brokers were familiar with him and the work he did.”

Sewing was a mentor to many of the people he met over the years and he made friends easily.

Richard Pacheco, owner of foundation repair company Allied Foundation, met Sewing on a job site more than 30 years ago and the pair struck up a professional relationship that developed into a friendship.

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They confided in each other and shared stories about the challenges they faced in business. Pacheco was impressed by Sewing’s rare ability provide a trusted service

at a reasonable price.

They also shared laughs. Sewing had a quick sense of humor and an enthusiasm that was contagious, Pacheco said.

“He was fun to be around. His demeanor when he came out to the job site, it was like all hell broke loose,” he said. “He was like a whirlwind, nothing short of a force of nature.”

Sewing became an advocate for preservation through his love for historic architecture. He encouraged home buyers to restore the old bungalows and two-story brick homes of the greater Third Ward area and educated them on how it could be done.

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“He probably saved a lot of homes people would have torn down,” said Womak, president and CEO of Womack Development & Investment Realtors.

Educator Eric Coleman got to know Sewing when he started buying investment



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When Coleman was renovating his 1950s home in Riverside Terrace, his wife insisted Sewing come over to inspect an interior catwalk that was under construction. Trying to save money, Coleman had purchased a low-cost beam for the raised walkway. His wife wanted Sewing to give it his blessing.

“He came in and just looked at it and was like, ‘Nope,’” Coleman said. “I like to cut corners and he would never cut corners.”

Sewing grew up in Kansas City, Kan. and was the first Black student to graduate in architectural engineering from Kansas State University.

He served in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and moved to Houston in 1963, where he worked as an architectural engineer with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. He later became deputy regional director with the U.S. Department of Commerce and was promoted to regional director with offices in Dallas and Chicago.

For nearly two decades he taught construction and inspection at Houston Community College’s central campus.

Sewing and his first wife, Sarah Rowles Sewing, settled in Riverside Terrace in the greater Third Ward area, a historically African American community south of downtown. They had two children: Joy and Jon.

He is survived by his children, his wife Patricia Sewing, and her four children: Dr. Lisa Pearsall Otey, Dr. Gurney F. Pearsall Jr., Staci Pearsall Tate and Dr. J. Patrick Pearsall.

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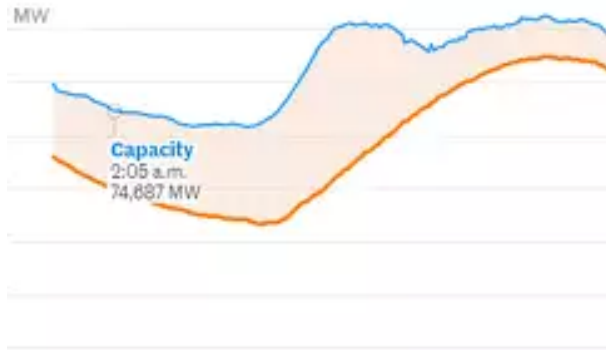


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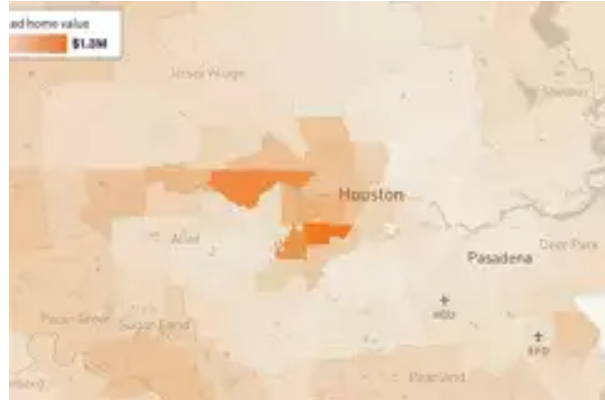
Nancy Sarnoff covered commercial and residential real estate for the Houston Chronicle. She also hosted Looped In, a weekly real estate podcast about the city's most compelling people and places. Nancy is a native of Chicago but has spent most of her life in Texas.

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