



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

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Mr. Mineola

I wanted to write something poetic here. My intention was to memorialize a good friend with words that would strengthen those of us who loved him while capturing his extraordinary spirit for those who didn't know him. But I got stuck, starting and stopping a good half a dozen times as no words seemed to be doing my sentiments justice. Then, as providence would have it, I came across a quote from the American essayist, E.B. White, who

wrote "To achieve style, begin by affecting none."

So I will affect none. I'll do away with flowery phrases and just tell you a little bit about my good friend, John DaVanzo who passed away this past week at the age of 92. He wouldn't have wanted anything written about him anyway, but if it was to be, my plainspoken friend would have told me to "say what you mean and mean what you say."

"Mr. Mineola," as he was affectionately known was born and raised here in our hometown and he never left. He was a rare, four-letter man at Mineola High School: football, baseball, basketball and track. Not long after he graduated in 1939 he enlisted in the Navy and served on the American destroyer, the U.S.S. Glennon during World War II. Just two days after D-Day, as they patrolled the coast of Normandy, his ship hit a mine. Listing, it then took three direct hits from a German artillery battery the very next day. A total of 25 of his friends lost their lives and 38 were wounded, but John managed to survive and eventually returned to Mineola where he married his sweetheart and settled down to raise five children.

In 1955 this young man decided to serve the village he called home and was elected trustee, embarking on a lifetime of public service that would eventually make him Mineola's most beloved citizen. Whether it was overseeing the construction of the village pool that now bears his name or designing the village logo that's become a powerful symbol of community pride, John was nothing if not pure energy. He was motivated by his belief that Mineola was a little slice of heaven and he dedicated his whole life to keeping it that way. He served on the board for 10 years, five of which were spent as the deputy mayor. He was also a town clerk and a 54-year member of the Mineola Fire Department. But his selflessness extended far beyond our village boundaries. John volunteered in numerous local organizations including the Kiwanis, the Sons of Italy, the VFW, and the Knights of Columbus, to name just a few. And even into his 90's, when he was certainly entitled to leave it to someone else, John dutifully showed up week in and week out to volunteer at St. Francis Hospital in Port

Washington.

You see, John didn't believe in passing the buck. He understood that he had unique, God-given gifts that could be shared with friends, neighbors and even strangers. His smile, his warmth and his good-natured conversation were free for the taking. He always had a "How do you do?" for everyone – and I mean everyone – that he met. I'll never forget the vice-like grip of his handshake or how he never let anyone pick up a check. I'll also never forget how I once snuck over to our waiter to pay the bill before he could. I came close to wearing my meal on my head that day.

The best part of all this was that his kindness, his joy was real. Whether it was as public servant or simply being a pal in the diner with friends, John loved to give. He got a charge out of it. It kept him motivated and happy and that was contagious. And he never complained or sat back and told others what to do. If there was anything going on anywhere in Mineola, you could be sure that John DaVanzo was right in the thick of it, sleeves rolled up and working furiously at his task. He walked the walk and if you have a pleasant memory of anything in or around Mineola, rest assured that he had a hand in shaping it. I really wish you could have known him.

John DaVanzo did immeasurable good for countless people. He was part of what we now call the "greatest generation". But it wasn't just how these men and women pulled together during the war that gave them that reputation. It's how they came together after it ended, with optimism, goodwill and service to build our communities and our country. There were probably thousands upon thousands of people just like John across our nation and it's just a crying shame that we're losing them. They offer us a dignity and civility that's on the decline these days - qualities that make a sometimes ugly world just a bit more palatable. For over 35 years John did that for me. So, if you know anyone like this, savor every moment that you have because they just don't make them like that anymore.

Thanks, John. Rest in peace dear friend.