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Political Leader Tom Manton Dies At 73

BY JOHN TOSCANO

Thomas J. Manton, who passed away last Saturday at age 73, was a consummate gentlemen in both his personal life as well as his public and political career, which spanned half a century. Manton started out as a New York City cop, went on to become a City Councilmember, a Congressman and, finally, for the last 20 years, Queens Democratic Party chairman.

When the rigors of his political role demanded it, the soft-spoken party boss with the easy smile didn't hesitate to make hard, honest decisions even when they adversely involved long-time, very close friends.

This opinion was shared by many who knew him, including this reporter, who interacted with and observed Manton's relationship with colleagues at City Hall throughout his tenure there from 1970 through 1984 and on numerous other occasions, including every primary and general election at Democratic county headquarters in Forest Hills.

Mary Lou Plunkett and her daughter, Jamie, who worked for the party in Forest Hills formed their opinion of Manton from knowing him close-up for more than 35 years, including his 20-year reign as Democratic county leader, were of the same opinion.

Jamie Plunkett and her mother said that Manton was a father figure who treated the teenage volunteers as well as the old-time district leaders graciously.

Jamie Plunkett added: "In all the time I worked with him, I never saw him break his word, utter a cross word, ask for special treatment. He is a perfect gentleman who asked for very little for himself. When tough decisions had to be made, we would say, 'Tom has broad shoulders', and he did."

The Plunketts said this was the general opinion of Manton, from Michael Reich, the executive secretary of the organization and the man closest to Manton during his party leadership period to the rest of the headquarters staff.

Gazette Publisher Tony Barsamian paid tribute to Manton as well. "Manton was a true friend over the years and always had the good of the borough foremost in mind, whether in public office or in politics," he said.

Manton didn't succeed in politics on his congenial personality alone. He did it on his effectiveness as a politician, keeping the heavily Democratic borough loyal to the organization and unerringly re-electing Democrats year after year.

Manton also showed his extensive political prowess by using his party's power to win a high percentage of committee chairmanships in the city council under incumbent Council Speaker Christine Quinn and her predecessor, Gifford Miller.

He was accused by rival county leaders of "playing too much politics with the city government", but it appeared he was only playing the game better than they did.

Manton received glowing accolades from numerous Democrats and even one prominent Republican—Mayor Michael Bloomberg—upon his passing.

Bloomberg, who publicly announced Manton's death at a press conference Sunday morning in Astoria while discussing the area's power blackout, recalled that he had reached out

to Manton a number of times when he first toyed with the idea of entering public service.

He said Manton regaled him with stories of what politics in New York City was really all about as they lunched in an Italian restaurant.

Calling Manton "a classy guy", Bloomberg concluded, "He really did leave the city better than he found it, on a number of levels, and even up through three months ago, was giving me advice."

Councilmember James Gennaro (D-Fresh Meadows), said: "He was a kind, sweet, gentle man, the likes of which politics rarely sees. His passing is a profound personal loss for all who were blessed to know him."

With Manton's death speculation followed as to who would succeed him. The consensus was, as in the recent past, that it would be his closest political ally, and his hand-picked successor, Congressman Joseph Crowley (D-Queens/The Bronx).

Crowley declined to address the subject so soon after Manton's death. The 44-year-old lawmaker from Elmhurst told reporters: "My great friend has just passed and I'm not going to entertain any questions about what the future of the



Tom Manton was the personification of the American Dream. The son of immigrants from the Irish countryside, Tom Manton was born and raised a New Yorker. After serving with honor and distinction in the United States Marine Corps, Tom Manton put himself through college and law school while serving proudly as an officer of the New York Police Department.

"He was recognized by his community in Western Queens for his outstanding leadership abilities when his neighbors chose him to represent them on the New York City Council from 1970 to 1984. I was proud to call myself a col-

During his campaign for Congress Manton waves as his Washington Express makes its way on 21st Street in Astoria in August 1984.

Pictured below ca. 1984 at a political bash are from l. to r. sons John and Tom, a friend of the family, Mayor Ed Koch, wife Diane and Manton.

party is. What I can say is that Tom Manton has left this party in the best condition it could possibly be left in. His death is a tragedy, not only for Queens but for the country and the city, too."

State Senator George Onorato (D-Astoria), who also served as a district leader under Manton, struck a similar note as the mayor. "Manton's one overriding goal was to make Queens a better place for all of us," he declared.

Onorato stated that in all his legislative and political roles, "Tom woke up each morning and went to bed each night thinking about how he could best serve the people of the borough that was his home all of his life and that he loved so well."

Congressmember Carolyn Maloney (D-Queens/Manhattan) noted that she and Manton were colleagues both in the New York City Council and the Queens delegation of the U.S. House of Representatives. In a tribute to Manton Maloney intended to deliver on the House floor later this week, she noted: "Indeed,

