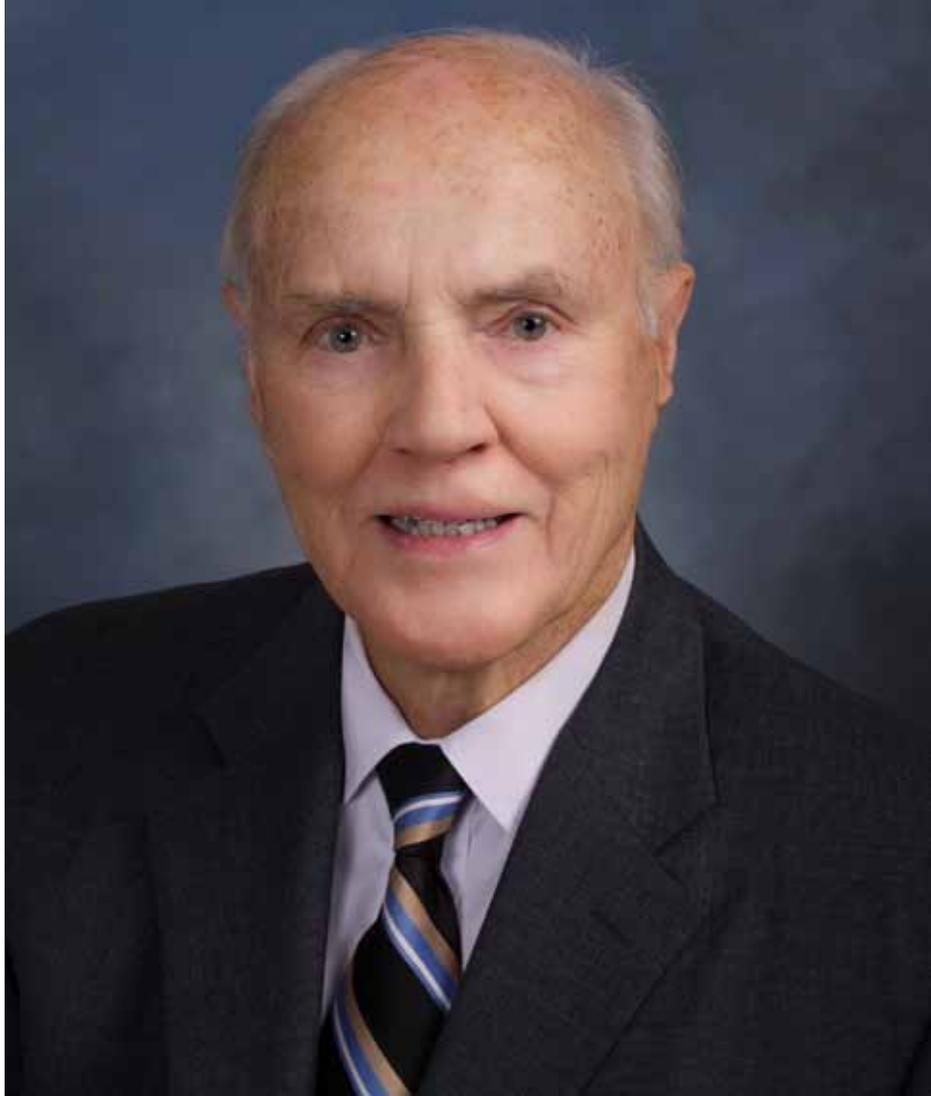


MAKING A DIFFERENCE

*Tim Curtin, Jr.
honored as 2013
Stamford Citizen
of the Year*



By Sherry Shameer Cohen

After a long and successful career, Tim Curtin, Jr. paid his dues in the workforce and should be enjoying his golden years as a retiree. But at the age of 86, retirement is just not in his foreseeable future. He has been too busy contributing his expertise as an unpaid advisor in the City of Stamford.

This year, his long-time contribution to the city is recognized as he was chosen to be awarded with the prestigious Citizen of the Year award.

The prestigious COTY award has been given each year since 1945 to someone who has met the criteria based on values such as believing strongly in interfaith harmony, showing high standards of responsibility in civic life, promoting projects for the public welfare, and personally working to benefit Stamford as a whole. “There are few citizens who have dedicated as much of their time, energy and passion to the community as Tim Curtin,” said Mayor David Martin. “He has set an example for all of us in public service. Each time Stamford has asked Tim to serve, he

has stepped up and done an outstanding job.” Curtin has achieved all of that and then some during his 50 years of volunteering in Stamford and beyond.

“Tim was a long-time member of my cabinet during which his knowledge of the issues affecting the city was invaluable,” recalled Governor Dannel Malloy, who worked with Curtin during his 14 years as Stamford’s mayor. “When I left office to become Governor, Tim was tapped to serve as an advisor to my Republican successor Mayor [Michael] Pavia, a move which clearly speaks to Tim’s competence as a public administrator. I am thankful for Tim’s loyalty and service and proud to call him a friend.”

Curtin’s interest in working in government has been an integral part of his life since he came home to the United States after serving in the Navy. His hometown of Norwood, Massachusetts had a population of about 16,000 people back then. His father, Tim Curtin, Sr. was the school dentist, and everyone in town knew the Curtin family. Curtin’s Irish-born grandparents moved to Norwood, which had a large Irish population, after their wedding.

A mill town, Norwood “had an open town meeting form of government, which meant that every citizen could come vote on issues,” he recalls. “Then they decided to have a limited form of town meeting with two representatives from each district. I was a student at Boston College. I got elected. I went around the neighborhood to thank people. The first house I went to was around the corner.” The neighbor, Mr. Kelly, was surprised. “Timmy, was it you that was running? I thought I was voting for your dad.”

That remark didn't put Curtin off. He does not come across as someone with a big ego. Curtin looks younger than his age. He still walks erectly and he talks quietly with a slight Massachusetts accent. He pursues his interests quietly but resolutely, and does whatever it takes to achieve them. After Boston College, he spent 12 years working as an agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation first in Washington, D.C., then in New Jersey. He loved working at the bureau, but the pay wasn't enough to support and educate his growing family. Curtin earned a J.D. from Seton Hall University Law School and later an M.B.A. from UConn. Just before his interview with a hiring manager for the legal department at CIBA-Geigy (now known as Novartis AG) in Westchester, he casually chatted with a secretary there. She told him that she lived in Stamford and she thought it was a wonderful place to live. He checked it out. This was in the late 1960s, when Stamford didn't even have much of a skyline, let alone the pulse it has today. Corporations were just starting to move their headquarters to Fairfield County. The beginning of Stamford's urban renewal was several years away, but Curtin was already impressed with what he saw.

CROSS-POLLINATION

Curtin and his wife, the former Fay Dohndorf, first moved to North Stamford and later to Shippan. As Stamford grew during the initial phases of the urban renewal project, so did its needs, and Curtin became increasingly involved here, while still holding various leadership positions in Westchester. Both areas shared similar values. White Plains had undergone its own downtown renewal and building of office complexes near the highway. The schools in Westchester had a good reputation. There were people who lived in Westchester but worked in Stamford and vice versa. This cross-pollination was rich, and Curtin had a foot in both areas and followed his interests in various nonprofit organizations. His belief was that if something was lacking or needed improvement, make it happen. Political party control does not matter to him as much as working as a team member to get things done. In addition

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to working with then Mayor Malloy, Curtin worked on the transition committees for former Mayor Pavia and now Mayor Martin.

By the time the Curtins moved to Stamford, the city already had a lot of promise and some strong leaders who envisioned its recovery from urban decay into a city that is exciting and would draw more people. He had been chairman of the Board of the Council for the Arts in Westchester and he loved the fact that Stamford had already had professional music and theatre even in the 1970s. “We [now] have so many wonderful institutions in Stamford – The Stamford Center for the Arts, Loft Artists, Curtain Call, Stamford Symphony. These are gifts to the city.” He and his wife, Fay, are long-time subscribers to the Stamford Symphony and he praises Music Director Eckart Preu and Executive Director Barbara Soroca for keeping the symphony first-rate. Fay has a studio in their Shippan home, where she spends the day painting while listening to music. He is proud that his wife's works include a commissioned painting of the U.S.S. Winston S. Churchill, the first American ship to have a British officer on board, and that her art has been on exhibition in the Mayor's Gallery.

Education has always been important to the Curtins, whose four sons attended Stamford Public Schools. While serving on the Board of Directors of the United Way of New York State and Chairman of the Board of the United Way of Westchester and Putnam, he supported its project Success by 6. This organization provides training to early childhood educators and parents to engage children in learning. This was almost prescient on Curtin's part because at that time, the rumbles about preschool and enrichment programs were not yet at the top of most people's minds. He also served on the corporate cabinet of the State University of New York at Purchase (now called Purchase College).

REVITALIZATION

In 1995, Malloy, then mayor of Stamford, tapped Curtin to work with him on the mayoral transition. After that, Malloy asked him to “stick around” and Curtin became

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a nonsalaried special assistant for various projects. Curtin has the abilities to assess the whole picture and to be able to figure out how to get done whatever needs to get done. "Over the last 20 years, Tim has amassed an impressive record of civic engagement, volunteering his time, talent and energy to serving the people of Stamford," said Malloy. "As Director of Operations, Tim oversaw the completion of several significant projects – most of which were finished on schedule and under budget – including the renovation of Old Town Hall and the construction of an upgraded Water Pollution Control Facility, the largest capital project in city history," he added.

Malloy asked Curtin to help revitalize the Holly Mansion in Cove Island Park. This was Curtin's first significant volunteer activity in Stamford, he says, and he is proud of the job SoundWaters and the city did to restore the building. The once decaying manor now houses SoundWaters, which has developed from an 80-foot three-masted schooner to an on-land coastal and environmental education center and laboratory. The boat is still used as a teaching vessel in schools and field sites, but the center has many activities for schools, corporations and civic organizations that include music and history, as well as aquaria, living salt marsh, and interactive displays.

After the SoundWaters project his volunteer activities "just flowed from there" – no pun intended.

Malloy asked Curtin to serve as the Interim Director of Economic Development from April 1998 through July 1999. Five months after he completed that, he held the position of Director of Operations and chaired the board of the Stamford Water Pollution Control Authority. The operations job was very intense and time consuming. "I stayed there for seven years," he said, "but was worn down by the night hours. We agreed that I would stay as a volunteer. That opened the door to a lot of stuff."

Curtin is still the chairman of the Old Town Hall Re-development Agency. In addition to helping to preserve the historic landmark, he was involved in saving the WPA Daugherty Murals, promoting public art in Stamford and building four new parks. Although Curtin left the Office of Operations in 2007, he returned to the position of an unpaid assistant to the mayor and he continues to supervise special projects.

"Many people don't realize how hard city employees work," he said. "I've been a witness to it for a number of years. It's not your regular workday. Many are here at night for meetings." The Board of Finance, Board of Representatives and Board of Education are made up of people who volunteer their time to help run the city. They meet in the evenings and city employees must also be there to present

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their proposals for approval and to get funding for projects. The mayor oversees the whole operations.

In 2012, Curtin led Stamford's 17th annual St. Patrick's Day Parade. He was totally surprised to have been chosen, but he was happy to help celebrate his Irish heritage in the city he loves. He was also honored at the annual Grand Marshall's Dinner. He never expected to be chosen as the 69th Stamford Citizen of the Year. "I was completely blown away," he said.

This honor has elated people he has known and worked with for years. Jeanne Franklin, the founding director of the Stamford Senior Center, said, "I can't tell you how thrilled I was when Tim Curtin was named Citizen of the Year. He is so deserving [of the award]. It's about time that he gets this kind of recognition." Franklin added, "I have personally known Tim Curtin and how important he is and has been to and continues to be [to Stamford] with his extensive knowledge, experience and wisdom and, most of all, his way of dealing with people and issues and seeing how they respect and admire him....He hasn't got an ounce of arrogance or pretentiousness....Nobody rises to Tim's level."

Curtin would never even think of himself that way. His involvement in the City of Stamford is "a labor of love," he says humbly. "This is a great city with a lot of great people involved in its management. I have been fortunate to be able to work with them."

Rick Redniss has been involved in the City of the Year event for 10 years. He notes that "there's been a variety of people who have been honored [but] mostly it's for one thing they've done," or one thing for which they are best known for having achieved. "Tim has such a long history in terms of volunteer services and it crosses so many lines," he said. "He doesn't have a mean bone in his body....He is such a great guy [that] you want to work hard for him. You don't want to let him down....For a guy to get done what he has accomplished in the style he does it is an amazing accomplishment by itself." He referred to the adage that in order to make an omelet you have to break an egg and added, "Tim makes an omelet and the shell is intact." ■