

Half Staff – Bennett D. Carlson

July 8, 1999

Bennett D. Carlson, 85, husband of Ruth H. (O'Reilly) Carlson of 7 Marmion Way, Rockport, formerly of Belmont, died on Thursday morning, July 8, at the Addison Gilbert Hospital. He was born in Plainville on Jan. 4, 1914, to the late Louis and Svea (Karlsson) Goldberg. Mr. Carlson attended Brown University and Northeastern University.

He served as a public information officer at the Watertown Arsenal from 1946-67, and as a public relations officer at the Defense Contract Administration Services Region in Boston from 1967 until he retired in '72.

Mr. Carlson a veteran of World War II, having served in the US Navy.

He had resided in Rockport since 1967 and was very active in town affairs. Mr. Carlson was honored in April of this year by the town of Rockport with a Resolution of Appreciation for serving on the Council on Aging for 26 years, 23 of them as chairman. During his tenure with the council, he initiated the fuel assistance program, and participated in food distribution programs such as Meals on Wheels and the Open Door Program. He was named Volunteer of the Year by the town of Rockport in 1995.

Mr. Carlson served on the Rockport Youth Commission for six years and on the Committee to Evaluate the Administration Building for affordable housing.

He was a member and past president (1976-77) of the Rockport Rotary Club, where he was awarded a Paul Harris Fellowship and was twice named as Rotary's Man of the Year in 1985 and '91.

He was a member and past commodore (1980-81 and 1983-84) of the Sandy Bay Yacht Club, a past member of the board of the Cape Ann Symphony Orchestra and a past incorporator of the Granite Savings Bank in Rockport.

In 1972, Mr. Carlson was proclaimed a Paul Revere Patriot by Massachusetts Gov. Francis Sargent.

He is survived by his wife of 40 years, Ruth H. (O'Reilly) Carlson of Rockport; and several cousins.

Townpeople bid farewell to “mentor”

By Michelle Morrissey, Gloucester Daily Times

Bennett Carlson wore many hats in his 32 years in Rockport. He was involved in town government, helped the elderly, visited ailing friends, pushed for a senior center and affordable senior housing, and was a devoted husband to his wife, Ruth.

But more important than the many honors and awards he received for his hard work, Carlson bore the honor of being a mentor to nearly everyone he came in contact with through his many projects.

Family and friends gathered yesterday at the First Congregational Church on School Street to pay tribute to Carlson, who died at 85 in July 8.

Roger Lesch, who took over for Carlson as chairman of the Council on Aging, remembered him as a “genuine, honest man... who I considered a mentor.”

Lesch joked that when Carlson talked him into taking over as head of the council, “he said it would be very little paperwork, and that he threw most of what he got in the mail.”

John Thompson gave a brief speech about Carlson, and Rev. Cameron Borton said Carlson was a man beloved by children, who called him by his first name, “perhaps because they saw there was a child inside Bennett.”

Ruth Carlson said she was especially touched that the students in the sailing classes at the Sandy Bay Yacht Club held an honor guard at the burial.

“Those children were wonderful, and he enjoyed working with them,” she said.

Bennett, who was a member and past president of the yacht club, spent countless hours over the past several years organizing and planning different events.

Bennett’s cousin, David Tillman, sang “How Great Thou Art” at yesterday’s service, which Ruth called “pretty spectacular.”

Carlson, a resident of 7 Marmion Way, worked in public affairs at the Defense Contract Administration Service Region in Boston from 1967 until he retired in ’72.

Ruth said after his retirement, Bennett not only had the time to volunteer, but made the time to take on several different projects.

“He loved people, and he wanted to do something with his time,” she said.

Carlson’s list of achievements reads like a resume in good Samaritanism. And for his family, his willingness to help others is what defined his life.

A World War II Navy veteran, Carlson moved to Rockport with Ruth in 1967. Since then, he organized and volunteered for many programs and initiatives that can be seen around town today; the Senior Center is among his greatest accomplishments.

He was honored in April with resolution of appreciation from the town, for his work with the Council on Aging. He served on the council for 26 years, 23 of them as chairman.

During his tenure, he began the fuel assistance program and was responsible for the creation of a senior center in Rockport. He also worked to create affordable housing at the Rockport High School apartments.

In addition to his work with the elderly, Carlson also worked with younger Rockporters, serving on the Rockport Youth Commission for six years.

He was a member and past president of the Rockport Rotary Club, was given the Paul Harris Fellowship, and was twice named as Rotary's Man of the Year, in 1985 and 1991.

He was a member and past commodore of the Sandy Bay Yacht Club, was named Volunteer of the Year by the town in 1995, was a past corporator of the Granite Savings Bank in Rockport, and was a past member of the board of the Cape Ann Symphony Orchestra.

Carlson's example of goodwill is being carried on by his family: in lieu of flowers, friends were asked to make contributions in his memory to the Rockport Ambulance Committee Gift Fund and/or the Sandy Bay Yacht Club.