

JCCA Journal

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The Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans

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Tony Durpetti a truly worthy recipient of our Bernardin Award

by Jo Ann Serpico, President

In 1996 Steve Fiorentino, who was President of the JCCA, and President Emeritus Dominic DiFrisco met with Cardinal Bernardin, asking permission to establish an award in his name. The two emissaries explained to the Cardinal that the recipients will be those who exemplify his virtues of caring, humility and goodwill. These qualities had been the Cardinal's hallmark during his tenure as Archbishop of Chicago. Thus, the Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Humanitarian Award was created. The Cardinal himself was the first recipient that year.

Since then, many outstanding men and women have been deserving recipients of this prestigious award. This year's honoree, Tony Durpetti, is another great Italian American whose life is laden with helping and supporting others.

The following is his biography written by his daughter, Michele Durpetti.

"Anthony 'Tony' Durpetti was born to Aldo and Mary Durpetti in February of 1944, just west of Gene and Georgetti's restaurant, to which he would be inextricably linked for the majority of his adult life. He was the third of four children. Tony grew up in a home where charity and giving were second nature. His mother, Mary, dedicated herself to helping the homeless, often hosting them at her own dinner table in their River North apartment. While they didn't grow up with much, they grew up appreciating what they had. Mary was also a constant presence and source of comfort for Italian immigrants as they arrived in Chicago. She would help them acclimate, provide support and lend a hand wherever she could. At a young age she encouraged her children to volunteer their time at their local church, Assumption. The Order of Servants of Mary (OSM), commonly called the Servites (founded in Florence, Italy in 233), worked at Assumption Church to provide care for the arriving Italian immigrants at that time.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of humanity." This statement and the example his mother provided of giving because it was the right thing to do stayed with Tony throughout his life.

He graduated from St. Michael's High School in 1963, and began attending Northwestern University through their night school program, while he worked during the day at an advertising agency. Tony was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1965, and he served his two years at a Hercules Missile site in Zweibrücken, Germany.

He credits his time in the Army as largely responsible for developing who he became as an adult, and it was in the Army that he first realized where hard work and dedication can get you. He made Sergeant E-5 in less than 11 months. He was discharged in 1967. It was this same year that he met a young

woman by the name of Marion Michelotti, who lived, by chance, across the street from Tony's brother in Elmwood Park.

Tony and Marion married on Tony's birthday in 1969, the same year he began working at McGovern Guild Radio as a rep/salesman. He rose through the ranks of McGovern Guild quickly, making sales manager in 1971, Chicago regional manager in 1973 and then in 1975 he became the executive vice president central division.

After 10 years of marriage, Tony's daughter Michelle was born in 1979. Both he and Marion call this the 'most positive' event in their lifetime, and said it gave him renewed energy. So in 1985, when he was asked to move to New York to become president of McGovern Guild, that ever-constant ambition coupled with the energy, love and inspiration he received from his family, he turned it down. On a family vacation to Italy, Tony sat down

with his father-in-law and talked about the possibility of pursuing a lifelong dream — to go into business for himself. He founded Durpetti & Associates shortly thereafter, with 12 offices throughout the United States.

Just one short year later, in 1986, the radio business report named him Executive of the Year, largely due to the dramatic success and rapid growth of Durpetti & Associates.

In 1989, Tony's father-in-law and friend, Gene, asked that he get involved in the family business, Chicago Steakhouse Gene & Georgetti. Gene Michelotti and his partner Alfredo Federighi, who was nicknamed Georgetti, founded Gene & Georgetti in 1941. Located in the heart of River North, Gene & Georgetti is Chicago's oldest steakhouse. Partners Gene and Georgetti worked hand-in-hand to establish the reputation of excellence that it upholds today.

In October of 1989, Gene passed away. Tony ran both businesses for seven years until his retirement from radio in 1996. Together with his wife, they purchased the restaurant from Marion's mother, Ida, in 1992, and have operated the business ever since.

Over the years Tony has exemplified himself as a true humanitarian with his outstanding contributions to Assumption Church, Catholic Charities, Chicago Commit to Courage Medal of Honor Convention, Chicago Gateway Green, Children's Memorial Hospital, Fraternal Notre Dame Soup Kitchen, Gold Star Society Chicago Police Memorial Foundation, Independent Cattlemen's Retail Association and the Scholarship Fund (co-founder), Joint Civic Committee of Italian Americans, Lamb's Farm, Reese Erlan Foundation and Trinity High School."

This year's Humanitarian Award Dinner will be held on Sunday, June 12, at the Donald E. Stephens Ballroom of the Rosemont Convention Center. The June column will feature the Rev. Claudio Holzer, the recipient of the Robert J. Cimo Peacemaker Award, which is also presented



TONY DURPETTI