

Remembering Joe

I am honored today to speak about a friend of everyone here, Joe Kostelnik.

Back during the 2008 presidential campaign, the term "Joe the Plumber" became a sensation. Well, they totally missed the right man! Our Joe was the real embodiment of Joe the Plumber, friend to all, willing to help anyone at any time, and a truly good and humble person.

When I tried to capture the essence of Joe's 86 years, the one thought that immediately came to mind was "Joe loved" and WOW, that was it. Now, I would like to share with you 5 things that he loved.

Joe LOVED.... Work

There was no project too small nor one too big for Joe to tackle, whether fixing a radio (remember vacuum tubes) or designing and building his beloved clubhouse on the Mississippi.

Of course, how he loved working in his garden, tomatoes and beans especially. He was a jack of all trades and master of most (computers being the exception).

When visiting you or at home, he could never just sit. He was always looking for some job to do whether you needed it or not! (Just ask his kids). Joe found dignity in doing a job and doing it well.

Joe LOVED.... Fishing

What an enigma! He could never be still at home, but put a fishing pole in his hands and he could sit for hours, smoking his pipe, and ponder the problems of the world.

Whether it was casting his line into the Gulf of Mexico, the mighty Mississippi, the little lake in Willmore Park with kids or Spanish Lake for ice fishing with Carole, he was happy. He didn't care if he caught anything; it was the challenge that was mattered.

Joe LOVED.... Country and Service to Country

Joe was a veteran of World War II and extremely proud of his tour on the supply ship USS Mellette in the closing years of the war and fierce fighting in the Pacific at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. He also cherished being in Tokyo Bay for the signing of the Japanese peace treaty on the USS Missouri in August 1945. He also relished his many reunions with fellow Mellette veterans, remembering the price service-men paid for our freedom.

Joe LOVED.... Family & Friends

Starting from the top, his wife Fran was the love of his life for more than 65 years. Joe was really a romantic at heart and they were the smooch-iest couple around.

He was so proud of his three children and their spouses, Bob & Marilyn, Ken & Sue, and Carole & Dave, all very talented and individually successful. Every visit with Joe and Fran was filled with how well things were going with the kids and their families.

He also doted on his eight grandchildren, Jeff, Mark, Colleen, Zach, Kris, Amie, Tim, and last (but not least) Jenny. He loved to tell what they were doing and sharing photos.

For the rest of us here, especially his last remaining sibling Florence, Joe was a rock (NO, make that a Gibraltar). He was someone you could call and get all of the help you needed, regardless of the situation. For that we are all thankful!

Joe LOVED.... Cameras

On a lighter note, Joe never met a camera for which he couldn't flash a smile, regardless of how he was feeling. He was the most photogenic person I ever met. I have yet to see a photo in which his face was not shiniest one showing. My last photo of Joe was taken in October after Jeff and Lindy's wedding. Lindy is sitting in his lap and Joe has the biggest smile on his face you ever saw. I am sure that right now he is looking down here with an even bigger smile in his heart.

Finally

More than 52 years ago, my wife Bernadette and I were blessed to have Joe as best man at our wedding. But looking around today, it is easy to see that Joe was everyone's BEST MAN.

Thank you Joe! We will all miss you, each in their own way.

And may God give you everlasting peace!