

Deputy Mayor Ken Francis Remembered

A Nation has its Founding Fathers and a Township has its Town Fathers, but the late Deputy Mayor and Township Committeeman Kenneth H. Francis was more than a Town Father; he personified the heart and soul of Plumsted Township. Deputy Mayor Francis went home to be with the Lord on Saturday, September 29th, 2007 following his battle with cancer.

Deputy Mayor Francis served our Community for 16 years on the Township Committee and was a voice and vote to keep Plumsted rural and affordable. Having served with Kenny on the Township Committee, as well as, the Planning Board, I can attest to his legacy as a man with a vision and conviction to save open space and farmland. Kenny was the driving force and vocal proponent to retain our rural character. In the early 1990's, I fondly remember Ken taking me to a hunting cabin (for a Saturday morning breakfast) located off Hopkins Road and Ivins Drive in a beautiful wooded area of our Township laced with blooming Mountain Laurel. Ken was emphatic that we needed to preserve woodlands, in addition to farmlands, and that was the birth of Plumsted's Woodlands Preservation Program. Today, as a testament to Ken's vision, Plumsted has preserved well over 3,000 farm and woodland acres from being developed forever.

Not only is Plumsted indebted to Ken for his land conservation efforts, but for his fiscally conservative financial planning to keep Township Government debt-free. It was Ken, who would first and often, admonish the Committee to remain debt-free and live within our means on a "pay-as-you-go" basis. To this day, the Township Committee does not have any bonded indebtedness. Ken was the chairman of the Building Committee for the Township's first newly constructed Municipal Complex on Evergreen Road and under Ken's direction; we didn't build until we saved to keep us debt-free.

An even greater priority for Ken, other than the saving of our land, was the saving of lives. Ken was the Township Committee's representative to both the First Aid Squad and Fire Company. Ken was at the forefront to establish Plumsted's first full-time day coverage for First Aid Emergency Responders. Ken worked together with our First Aid Squad to have private insurance companies, Medicare or Medicaid pay for the ambulance services, rather than patients or taxpayers being responsible for billings.

Ken worked together with our Fire Company and Fire District to establish the Township's first Firehouse Building Trust Fund to receive the financial contributions of Developers that needed to address Fire Protection measures prior to Planning Board approvals.

Ken was a "people person." One cannot forget his passion for the youth of our Community, serving as an assistant scout master for the Cub Scouts and operating the New Egypt Recreation Oasis to provide family oriented activities, including the paddle boats and canoes at Oakford Lake Park.

Words cannot express, nor can eulogies or obituaries convey, the total positive impact of Ken's contributions to our Community and enhanced quality of life. We won't fill his shoes, but we can follow his footprints. Kenny began preparing a path for Plumsted's future 16 years ago and today, we enjoy his visionary leadership as a lasting legacy.