



## Rockland County Legislator John Murphy District 16 Newsletter - Winter 2015

*Serving the Communities of Pearl River, Tappan, Blauvelt, Sparkill, Orangeburg*



Dear Constituents,

Almost exactly 44 years ago, on December 7, 1971, I was sworn in as one of Orangetown's four Representatives on the Rockland County Legislature, which was only two years in existence. I was in my thirties and very idealistic. Upon ending my tour of active duty in the Marine Corps in the fifties, I moved from the Bronx to Pearl River and immediately fell in love with the community and decided to become an active contributing resident. Marines are born to volunteer.

Change was in the air. The County was being transformed by the creation of the Tappan Zee Bridge and Palisades Interstate Parkway, which facilitated the migration of the Middle Class from New York City seeking the optimum opportunity to own a home in a safe uncrowded place with great schools to raise their children. What was historically rural was rapidly becoming suburban. Concurrently, the culture of the care of people with brain related maladies caused by birth defects or disease and the culture of the care of orphaned, neglected, abandoned and abused children was also being transformed by what became known as "Deinstitutionalization," moving those in care from large congregate living campuses to smaller, more intimate, more individually personalized, family-model residences in the community. I thought it was a wonderful enlightening advance in human care and still do.

Rockland hosted two of our nation's largest State Government human care institutions: Rockland State Hospital in Orangetown, which served about 9,500 adults and children suffering from mental illness, and Letchworth Village in Haverstraw and Stony Point, which served about 5,500 intellectually and developmentally disabled adults and children. In addition, Rockland also hosted many large "orphanages," three of which I would have the honor of working with, St. Agatha's in Nanuet, operated by the Sisters of Charity; St. Agnes' in Sparkill, operated by the Dominican Sisters of Sparkill; and St. Dominic's in Orangeburg/Blauvelt, operated by the Dominican Sisters of Blauvelt.

It seemed to many at the time, that the two social/cultural transformations had to be in conflict in a non-urban community of mostly single family dwellings. I thought differently because of my family values, experience, education at Cardinal Hayes High School and Manhattan College, all of which gave form and expression to my instinctive empathy for people suffering from brain/mind damage, due to birth defects, disease, military combat damage, age, and too often, very cruel destructive childhoods. The core of my vision of more enlightened human care was forged by my unexplainable fascination with the brain, the most powerful and, at the same time, most fragile, tool humans have to guide us through the experience of life and, when damaged in any way, makes us dependent on others. I also treasured the goals of protecting, sustaining, nurturing a danger-free, fear-free, wholesome, non-urbanized community in which children would always be safe, get the best education, and enjoy a happy childhood, both in their own homes and in their neighborhoods, as I did. I am very proud of my small role in helping protecting that legacy in Orangetown as one of its County Legislators for 44 years.

So, with the patient mentoring of past and present Advocates of social justice and compassion, to whom I am grateful, the late Sister Mary Patrick and Sister Joseph Mary of St. Dominic's Home; Sister Helen Murphy of St. Agatha's Home; Jack, Kathy, and Dan Lukens, Barbara Reece and Bill Schule of Camp Venture; my legal mentor and great "Handicapped Law" expert and cherished friend, Charlie Davis; my high school and college classmate, Denis Barry; Lois Robinson, Don Brenner, Paul Adler, Steven Heit, Tom Zimmerman, Bob Crable, and Bob Reers, my dear friend and role model. Government-wise, I am grateful to Gene Levy, John Grant, Scott Vanderhoef, Ken Zebrowski, Ilan Schoenberger, Larry Toole, Betsy Saetre, Chris Seidel, and Pam Sitomer. Denis Troy also played a major role as a community leader in Orangetown by working with me, my wife, Eileen, Division III of the AOH, the Irish Arts Forum and the Helen Hayes Performing Arts Center in staging almost 75 productions and presentations of the Irish Performing Arts over a 25 year period to raise money for charitable causes. Eileen, who is my strength, puts all her heart and energy into my work. I think her inherent compassion was reinforced growing up a Catholic Irish Nationalist in what was then a very unjust, repressive Protestant British Unionist community. It taught her well about non-inclusionary social justice. Her childhood hometown was to become the most bombed town in Ireland during the "Troubles." She also has her own



special cause, the "Brest Buddies," who have labored for the past ten years to fund the research for the cause and cure of breast cancer. Together, we tried to make a difference. It's all a matter of record.

Ergo, I am retiring from the County Legislature, on the very last day of December, with profound humility and gratitude to all those who made the 44-plus year odyssey possible and fruitful. They include all those who voted for me in my 4 Primary Elections and my 12 General Elections and my fellow County Legislators of all political parties, towns, religions, and color, who embraced my philosophy of government by voting for my initiatives. My governance philosophy is best captured by these words: "It was once said that the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are

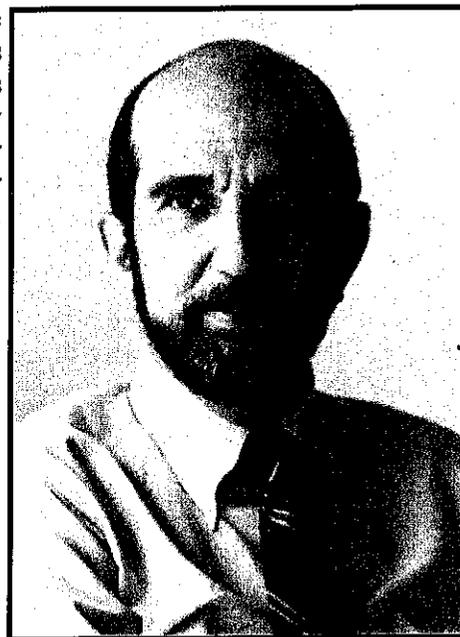
in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in the shadows of life, the sick, the needy, and the handicapped." ~ Vice-President/Senator Hubert H. Humphrey

A very, very special thank you to the County Legislative Staff, led by Larry Toole, who gave me total respect and administrative support as a member of the Minority, which clearly demonstrated that political party registration need not be a deterrent to fair, respectful, pleasant, professional, cooperative governance. Larry is a model public servant.

While I am exiting the world of politics and government, I am not leaving the agencies to which I am passionately committed: Camp Venture, which serves our intellectually and developmentally disabled; Loeb House, which provides community housing for our mentally ill; Joseph's Home, which provides housing to both our homeless and others with special needs; Homes For Heroes, which provides affordable, permanent, supportive housing for our disabled/displaced Veterans; the Rockland Psychiatric Center Board of Visitors, and the fight to keep Paula Bohovesky's killers in prison. All but the latter embody my vision that every human being with a broken brain, body and life must have, besides air, water, clothing, food, medical care and human care, a place to call "HOME."

A Post Script from some of John's colleagues: "While John's work has made him the most honored Orangetown local resident in its history, with 3 homes named after him, Honorary Doctorates of Humanity, election to Rockland's Human Rights Hall of Fame, and so much more, we believe the late Kathy Lukens, the Founder of Camp Venture, who worked with and inspired John for more than three decades, summed it up by saying that almost all the major advancements on human care in Rockland have John's fingerprints on them. And we all love one of his favorite poems by Emily Dickinson:

*If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.*



John will always be available at [murphy6288@icloud.com](mailto:murphy6288@icloud.com).

### Legislator John Murphy

[www.facebook.com/rockleg](http://www.facebook.com/rockleg) • 11 New Hempstead Road, New City NY 10956 • [www.rocklandgov.com](http://www.rocklandgov.com) •

Please do not hesitate to call or e-mail with any questions or concerns: (845) 638-5100 • [MurphJo@co.rockland.ny.us](mailto:MurphJo@co.rockland.ny.us)