

JOE HENNESSY

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By Thomas Rayfiel

Joe Hennessy, a longtime Coop member and beloved squad leader, died April 9 of complications related to the coronavirus. He was 82. Joe came to the United States from Ireland in 1957. After serving in the Army (with Elvis Presley!) he settled in Queens where he managed a taxi fleet and served in a variety of civic capacities, most notably, Chairman of Queens Community Board 6 and President of the Board of

Directors of the Forest Hills MHA Housing Development Fund Corporation. Joe was particularly sensitive to the plight of immigrants, the taxi industry being one of the areas where many newcomers would first seek employment. “He would always have their back,” Frank Gulluscio, District Manager of CB 6 said.

Joe joined the Coop in 1998 and ran the 1:00 Saturday B week shopping squad for many years. Sarah Flanagan, his co-squad leader, recalls how “he really cared about others and always took the time to talk with his squad members, ask about their families, and hear their concerns and hopes. He went out of his way to help, with kind words and also with actions. He understood that people have lives and sometimes need a helping hand, not a slap on the wrist.” Another of his co-squad leaders, Pam Kingpetcharat, marveled at how “even during the most hectic Saturday shopping squad shift, he had a way of being light and stern at the same time. There aren’t many people like him, but we need more of them, especially as we go through these challenging times.” Both women emphasized how proud Joe was of his wife, Cathy, and his family, as well as his dedication to the community.

Another side of Joe was remembered by Reginald Ferguson, who received Joe’s help in a disagreement he had with the Dispute Resolution Committee. Joe encouraged him to get an amendment to the bylaws passed ensuring that squad leaders, when subject to complaints, receive due process. “He fought for me,” Reginald remembers. “He fought for all of us.”

Hennessy is survived by Cathy, his wife of 57 years, their three daughters, Patricia, Karen, and Sheila, and eight grandchildren. He appears in a short video featured on the Coop’s website, in which he can be seen describing his role as a squad leader (“to make sure the shoppers are treated properly”) and professing his love for Fig Newtons. ■