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LONGTIME COUNCILWOMAN PASSES

MIDDLETOWN, R.I. (MAY 30, 2023) – Town Councilwoman M. Theresa Santos has passed.

A lifelong Middletown resident, the 88-year-old Santos made her mark with the town long before she served on the council. Known for her energy and close attention to the bottom line in the town's finance office, Santos worked for the town from 1966-1990.

Santos was first voted onto the council in 2000 and served on the town's top elected body for more than 20 years.

On May 27 after learning of Santos' passing, Town Administrator Shawn J. Brown ordered town flags to be lowered to half mast in her honor.

"I had the honor and privilege to serve with Theresa over the years on the Town Council," council President Paul M. Rodrigues said. "And while we didn't always agree, there is no doubt in my mind everything she did was so that Middletown could be the place she loved. She was Middletown and her impact will be felt for generations to come."

"Theresa was one of a kind and I learned so much about the town and its residents from her," Brown added. "She always wanted to make Middletown the best place it could be and held us all to a high standard so that it would be possible. She definitely made Middletown a better place to live, work and play and I know we're all missing her already."

As news of Santos passing spread over the weekend, her colleagues on the council and others with the town couldn't believe she was gone.

To some, Santos might have seemed old fashioned or set in her ways, but that wasn't really who the woman was. And while she was known to talk about Middletown and the loss of its agricultural roots, those who knew her best understood how much she genuinely cared.

Whether it was her insistence on new sidewalks along upper Aquidneck Avenue so schoolchildren wouldn't have to walk in the busy road to unwavering assistance for seniors and those less well off, Santos never forgot anyone.

Town Clerk Wendy J.W. Marshall said she was still trying to understand the loss of Santos, who was as active and feisty as even during the all-day budget meeting a little more than a week ago.

"I'm going to miss Theresa," Marshall said. "We would talk almost every day and she loved the town, loved it. Everything she did was for Middletown and to make it a better place for everybody."

Unbeknownst to most, Santos was a diehard Boston Celtics fan and loved watching basketball games right up to the end. She also had a wicked sense of humor and wasn't afraid to trade barbs with anyone — if the circumstances warranted it.

State Senator Louis P. DiPalma said he looked back on the years he served with Santos on the council fondly.

"The loss of Councilwoman Theresa Santos will have a big impact on the Town of Middletown," DiPalma said. "Having served with Theresa while we were both on the Town Council from 2004 – 2008, I can emphatically say she was a stalwart in preserving the history of our town. While gone from us, she will not soon be forgotten, as she has certainly left an indelible mark on us all."

Former Councilman Rick Lombardi agreed, saying he still can't believe his friend is gone.

"I don't think anyone I sat up there on the council with cared more about the town than she did," Lombardi said, who noted Santos knitted him a Middletown blue scarf he has to this day. "Not selling anybody short, but her heart and soul was dedicated to Middletown for almost her entire adult life."

Public Affairs Officer Matt Sheley said he always enjoyed speaking and joking with Santos — and appreciated her support from Day 1, whether it was his time as a reporter with The Daily News or working for the town in public relations.

"Theresa always had something good to say and made me feel like my work mattered," Sheley said. "I still remember when she heard I was having a daughter, she went out of her way to knit a yellow blanket (my favorite color) for Sarah. I know we still have it to this day and that's something I'll never forget and there are people across Middletown who I know have similar stories. She was that kind of person."

As for filling the now open seventh seat on the council, the Section 209 of Town Charter is clear it's up to her colleagues to fill that role.

According to the charter, "If a vacancy occurs in the membership of the council, for whatever reason, the remaining members of the council shall select a qualified person to fill the vacancy until the next regularly scheduled state or town election, at which time the electors shall elect a qualified person to complete any unexpired portion of the term."



The item is on the council's June 5 agenda at 6:30 pm in Town Hall, 350 East Main Road.

Document Link: <https://www.middletownri.com/DocumentCenter/View/8756/NYCU-Santos>