Charles Manos, schools superintendent and lifelong teacher, dies at 93

By Bryan Marquard

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Having grown up during the Great Depression without much money, Charles Manos was always looking for ways to help make the world around him run a little more smoothly.
"He was a creative problem-solver," said his daughter Kris. "No problem was too small to not warrant figuring out a better way to solve it or fix it."

As a longtime school administrator, for example, he recognized that a doctor’s appointment could cut into the sick days and vacation time of his teachers, so he found a solution that got him out of his office and let them save their time off. His plan also built staff loyalty and ultimately improved the quality of each school.

"He would say, ‘You go and I'll cover your class,’ ” his daughter said. “First of all, he loved that because he got to be with the kids in the classroom. But he also knew if he went the extra mile for them, they’d go the extra mile for him. It’s a kind of servant leadership where you lead by serving."

Mr. Manos, who formerly was the superintendent for the King Philip Regional and Norfolk school districts, died Jan. 25 in the Kaplan Family Hospice House in Danvers of complications from myelodysplastic syndrome. He was 93 and had lived in the Brooksby Village retirement community in Peabody.

"He treasured the kids. He was a superintendent for kids, really," said Frank Giuliano, a former schools superintendent in Milton and Franklin.
“He wanted the teachers to be teachers of children. And subject matter, of course, but the first thing was to be a teacher of children,” Giuliano said. “They were who mattered. He was a great educator who was really interested in the kids growing into good citizens.”

From his early years teaching history, to his tenure as an administrator, to working as a tour guide in retirement, Mr. Manos never missed an opportunity to help someone learn.

“He was fundamentally a teacher and a learner,” said his daughter Kris, who lives in Salado, Texas. “He couldn’t help teaching throughout his life. He loved to impart wisdom to anyone and everyone who would listen.”

Those lessons weren’t always offered in classrooms. Mr. Manos could turn a hobby into a discussion that opened a window to the world. “He collected stamps because he loved to learn history by understanding the stories behind them,” his daughter said.

Mr. Manos added to his stamp collection while traveling to dozens of countries with his wife, Bette. Over the years, people he met abroad, and others he knew as a tour guide, would send him stamps. A package arrived in the mail the day he died.

“He was just a wonderful man,” said Alan Ansello of Plymouth, a nephew of Mr. Manos. He taught me, and my daughter, Dawn, a lot about geography just through his stamps. We’d see his stamps and say, ‘Where’s that?’ ”

The fourth of five children, Mr. Manos was born at home in Dorchester. His father, Nicholas Manos, was from the island of Sifnos in Greece and ran candy stores. His mother, the former Jeanette Brymer, was from Nova Scotia and met Nicholas when she was a cashier in his store. Later in life, while in her 80s, she was cashier of the year at Purity Supreme.

As Mr. Manos told the story, he was born premature and was so small “that his mom took him to the doctor in a cigar box,” his daughter said. By the time he was old enough for school, however, he was so big physically that the teachers started him in the second grade.

He was still a boy when his father died, and Mr. Manos began working at Howes Leather Co. after graduating from Roxbury Memorial High School in 1941. He also took night classes at
the Bentley School of Accounting, from which he graduated in 1946. He then enlisted in the Army and served stateside with the 38th Infantry Division.

Afterward, at his mother’s encouragement, he studied to become a teacher at Keene State College in New Hampshire, from which he graduated with a bachelor’s in education in 1951 and a master’s in education in 1959.

While visiting the campus before enrolling, he first saw Elizabeth Berry, who is known as Bette, and whom he married in December 1950. “He still talked about seeing her when he went to visit in May — spotting her coming down the stairs of a dorm and thinking, ‘She’s the one for me,’” their daughter said.

Mr. Manos began his career in New Hampshire, teaching at Towle High School in Newport and Stevens High School in Claremont before becoming principal of a K-12 school in Ashland. In 1960, he and his family moved to Massachusetts, where he was the principal at Memorial High School in Middleborough before becoming the principal at King Philip Regional High School in Wrentham. He became superintendent of the King Philip system and then was superintendent and a principal for the Norfolk Public Schools before retiring in 1984.

With his wife, and initially with their two daughters, Mr. Manos was an inveterate traveler. Over the course of 10 summer vacations, they visited the provinces of Canada, Mexico, and all the contiguous states except for North Dakota. Bette Manos had worked as a high school English teacher and librarian, “and when they retired, they became world travelers,” Kris said.

They visited various countries using Eurail passes, and later traveled with tour groups. In all they visited some 70 countries from Iceland to Asia. “They fell in love with Bali and returned the second time,” Kris said, but they made sure to visit all countries in Asia at least once.

Along the way, Mr. Manos collected shells from every nation he could, and at home he turned them into lamps and doorstops that were works of art. He and his wife moved to Cape Cod and Mr. Manos began working as a guide for tour groups on the Cape and along the Eastern Seaboard from Washington, D.C., to Nova Scotia.
Working as a guide until a broken hip slowed him at 87, he was a teacher again, getting his groups to sing songs, entertaining them with jokes, “and telling them about everything that was passing by and making them happy,” his daughter said.

In addition to his wife and daughter, Mr. Manos leaves his other daughter, Cindy Reppucci of Melrose, and four grandsons.

Family and friends will gather to celebrate his life at 11:30 a.m. Tuesday in the chapel at Brooksby Village in Peabody.

After Mr. Manos died, those he had spent time with daily — from nurses and doctors to the people who waited on him at Brooksby — spoke to his family about his kindness and the attention he showed all he encountered.

“He had an intensity of focus,” Kris said. “People would say, ‘I felt so special when I was with him.’”

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