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A life well lived

Jacaruso celebrates turning 106 with family and friends

By Robert Sample
Correspondent



Margaret Jacaruso celebrates her 106th birthday with her nephew Gary. — Robert Sample photo



Margaret Jacaruso was joined by family and friends as she blew out the candles on the cake for her 106th birthday. — Robert Sample photo

Very few of us will have the opportunity to collect 40-plus years of Social Security payments. Stratford's Margaret Jacaruso is now on year 42. Jacaruso was born on July 25, 1912, when World War I was still two years in the future and William Howard Taft was president of the United States. Jacaruso went on to see the election of 18 more U.S. presidents. Just as remarkably, she has lived all 106 years of her life in Stratford.

On July 25, family, friends, caregivers and other well-wishers gathered with Jacaruso at Lord Chamberlain Manor to toast Jacaruso — celebrating her milestone birthday and sharing plenty of memories.

"I grew up on the South End," Jacaruso recalls. She

later moved to a house on Bridgeview Place, off East Main Street near the Mill River Country Club — where she remained for most of her life.

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Jacaruso —

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"I enjoyed living there very much. I had great neighbors," says Jacaruso.

Several of her longtime neighbors came to the celebration.

"I have the same birthday as Margaret," noted Nancy Masso. "I lived on Bridgeview Place until my own parents passed away. It was a wonderful place to live and Margaret was a fantastic neighbor."

Jacaruso's life is chock full of superlatives. She was the second oldest of 10 children, five boys and five girls, and is the only one still alive. Jacaruso also spent 42 years working for the same company — Stratford's Contract Plating, Inc., its headquarters formerly on Longbrook Avenue.

"It was a wonderful place to work," says Jacaruso. "It was a small company and the O'Connors [who owned Contract Plating] were wonderful people to work for."

Jacaruso started by handling the company's payroll, but later became company secretary for several O'Connor men who served at the company's helm. The last was Ray O'Connor, who shuttered the operation in 1995. The plant has since been demolished. The town is redeveloping the former industrial site.

In spite of its small size, Contract Plating had played an integral role in the town's business life during the years when it was in operation. It did a mix of commercial and government work, electroplating, anodizing and lacquering metals parts used in a wide range of manufactured products.

George O'Connor, with whom Jacaruso worked prior to retiring, was there to celebrate her big day along with daughter and area Realtor Emily O'Connor Karolyi.

"When I first began working in the shop in 1950, Margie had already worked there for 14 years," O'Connor recalled. "Big companies required platers to become certified

and we were among the ones who met their specifications."

O'Connor is a nephew of Contract Plating Chairman Raymond O'Connor and worked there during the company's heyday.

"Dad and Margie were best friends, and it's great to be able to celebrate such an occasion as this," said Karolyi.

Nephew Tom Adamchak attributes his aunt's longevity to staying active — even after she retired — and taking care of her health. "All through her life — before and after retirement — Aunt Margaret loved to travel," Adamchak says. "She traveled everywhere. When she wasn't away, she would volunteer for the Stratford Historical Society."

"Aunt Margaret was always a caregiver in the family — her older sister got married at a young age, and that left Margaret to help out with the younger kids," recalls another nephew, Gary Jacaruso. "She also took care of her own mother and father when they became older.

"As she grew older herself, Margaret took it upon herself to learn a lot of exercises — and she kept doing them — instead of just waiting for someone to make her," he added. "She was still driving at 92 and got T-boned by another driver."

Margaret Jacaruso's sister, Beatrice Picone, was in that accident as well. She was 10 years younger than Margaret, but never fully recovered. Jacaruso, in contrast, got well quickly and returned home.

Several years ago, Jacaruso moved into the Crosby Commons assisted-living facility in Shelton. That was where she marked her 100th birthday. She only transferred to Lord Chamberlain when she needed a higher level of nursing care.

While the oldest member of the Jacarusos family was feted, the youngest member of the clan attended as well. He was Gavin Jacaruso, Margaret Jacarusos's grand-nephew. He is 13 and will soon be an eighth grader at St. James School.