

James F. O'Bryan

Speech given by Laura Wright

2018

James F. O'Bryan was born in 1956 right here at Moses Ludington Hospital. He was the 4th of 5 children born to Jack and Toni O'Bryan and fit right into their Italian/Irish family. Jim not only inherited the family height, he also was well versed in the "live each day to the fullest" attitude his family practiced throughout his childhood. Jim is a true hometown boy, only leaving Ticonderoga for a brief 9 years right after high school

Following his graduation from Ticonderoga High School in 1975 Jim enlisted in the Air Force, where he served in Strategic Air Command until 1979. Next up for Jim was earning his 4 year degree in Criminal Justice from Buffalo State in 1984. The world was at his feet, and his girlfriend, Shari Gunning (also from Ticonderoga), was at his side.

So he married her. That was the easy decision. The more difficult discussion involved where to live. After experiencing 4 winters in Buffalo, I'm assuming that option was not on the table. Shari and Jim came to the conclusion that they wanted to live in Ticonderoga and raise their family here. This turned out to be a fantastic turn of events for the citizens of our community.

Jim's degree in Criminal Justice could have taken him in a few different directions, but his family was heavily ensconced in International Paper Company, having at least one family member employed there continuously since 1907. He chose to be a 3rd generation employee and began his career at IP in 1985.

Starting in the Health and Safety Division of International Paper, Jim's focus was on ensuring a safe and healthy environment for employees. In 1987, he led a team to design and author International Paper's first Emergency Response Program, and he continues to manage that program today. Keeping with the theme of safety, Jim was an EMT with the Ticonderoga Emergency Squad from 1986 until 1995, when he was no longer able to continue due to other time commitments. As many people in this room understand, volunteering with the Ti EMS is such a selfless gift to our community, and one that Jim truly loved.

During the past 30 plus years, Jim has held numerous positions in many areas of the Ticonderoga Mill, but has always remained involved with health and safety. He has been instrumental in helping to improve the treatment of injured workers by becoming a member of the Board of Managers for the New York Self Insurers' Association and the Advisory Board to the New York State Workers Compensation Chairman. Jim is currently the Manager of Safety Engineering, where he enjoys working with others who are focused on making what IP does safer for their employees, their environment and the communities that surround them. But Jim's training does not stop there. He is also on the Essex County Hazmat Team, trained in handling Chemical, Biological and Nuclear emergencies.

Outside of his career at International Paper Company, Jim has taken on numerous roles. In 1995, Jim still had his BS degree in Criminal Justice in his pocket... Couple that with his desire to help our community solve some of its problems, and in November of that year, Jim's name was on the ballot for Town Justice, and he was elected. His commitment to that position has been renewed every 4 years, and now, 23 years later, you can still see Jim running up the Community Building Stairs around 4:30 in the afternoon, his reflective IP vest flapping in the wind.

By Jim's count, he has handled over 3,000 civil cases, 5,000 criminal cases, and over 15,000 traffic tickets. Seeing as how our town's population is only 5000 or so, looking around this room, a few of you may have visited Jim in his "room of truth."

Town Justice can be a stressful job, but there is the fun side of that position...marrying people! Jim has performed many weddings in his time as a judge, but 3 weddings have stood out. There was the wedding where the little ring bearer lost both rings into Lake George... And then there was the time that Jim married the Sgt. Major of Roger's Rangers during an encampment at Fort Ti, which is exciting in itself, however, they dressed him up as a French General... a direct enemy of the Rangers. Lastly, Jim married a couple in the paper machine control room at the mill, with the Mill Manager as best man. In Jim's words, "The couple had the wedding there because that's where the husband spent most of his time and he was on a double." Through his position as judge, Jim has also had the opportunity to help innumerable troubled teens through education and facility visits, with an emphasis on drug and alcohol problems.

Jim was a charter member of the Alumni Association Board, serving 2 terms and was instrumental in the organization of the first Alumni Awards Ceremony during the 2005 Extravaganza. Jim continues to give back to our community through his involvement as a 3rd Degree Knight with the Knights of Columbus and his membership in the Essex County Magistrates Association, including a stint there as Vice President. In his spare time Jim enjoys golfing, biking, hunting and snowmobiling. But most importantly, he loves spending time as husband to Shari, father to 2 married daughters and, within the last year, grandpa to James and Jack.

I once read a quote that said, “A true community is not just about being geographically close to someone or part of the same social web network. It's about feeling connected and responsible for what happens. Humanity is our ultimate community, and everyone plays a crucial role.

It is my honor and privilege to introduce one of our community's humanitarians, and our Distinguished Alumni, Jim O'Bryan.

Ticonderoga Alumni Association's Distinguished Alumni Award

Speech Given by Laura Wright on July 27, 2018