

# Biography of George Cashman

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George Cashman (1925-2006)



Born in Newburyport in 1925, Cashman graduated from Newburyport High School and Holy Cross University and served in the U.S. Navy from 1943 to 1945. Cashman later earned graduate degrees in English Literature from Boston College, Social Education from Boston University, and advanced graduate study from the University of Massachusetts.

He helped run the Cashman Brothers Oil and Contracting Co., served as a deputy sheriff, and was chairman of the Newburyport Economics Commission throughout the 1950s, laying the groundwork for the downtown renewal and the creation of the Industrial Park.

Cashman was deeply involved in many local civic groups, volunteering his time for organizations like the Rotary Club of Newburyport, the Newburyport Health Center and Visiting Nurse Service, the American Legion Post 150, the Anna Jaques Hospital, the YWCA, and more than a dozen other local organizations. Cashman's legendary generosity extended into every corner of his life. He donated 5 pints of blood a year for more than 20 years.

At the time, Newburyport had a terrible reputation. People from as far as New York City knew it. It had the same reputation as metropolitan centers of today like Elizabeth, NJ, Lawrence, Lynn and Roxbury. Bossy Gillis, considered one of the most corrupt Mayor's in America, was notorious and known as far as Chicago. When visitors came, they often hurried past Newburyport as they were on their way to the wildlife preserve or the beaches. Not only did it have a bad reputation in the late fifties, but many in town were also dispirited and had lost hope there would be any improvement on the horizon.

To exacerbate the situation, businesses all across American were leaving the urban centers and heading out to the suburbs. This was the beginning of the commercial "strip". There are still local versions such as businesses strung along Route One in Salisbury, and Storey Avenue. The result was the loss of vibrancy in city centers across the country. Places such as Gloucester, Newburyport, Portland, Portsmouth and Portland were suffering with depressed inner commercial districts.

It was about that time in 1957, a New England artist, Jack Frost, with some powerful financial backers had proposed a strategy that would attempt to counteract this abandonment. He advocated "Yankee Homecoming" festivals that would serve as a "national pilgrimage back east where it all began." Frost hoped to restore pride and interest in old cities like Newburyport by encouraging all the "settlers" whose families had originally come from the east to return and explore the historic homesteads where their ancestors had once lived. In addition, the historic sites in those cities would encourage many to return to find their "roots" and at the same time understand the "roots" of their own national identity.

Thus, history was center to everything.



As Mr. Frost from his Boston headquarter went throughout New England proclaiming his brainchild, he met by chance in Cape Cod in 1957, Joe Mathers, then manager of the Newburyport radio station WNBK, and Frost shared his idea with him. Frost later met with George Cashman and encouraged them both to approach the Chamber of Commerce. There was some resistance to this idea at first but finally, the Chamber agreed to be a Yankee Homecoming City. Mayor Bossy Gillis did not embrace the concept and refused to give a dime for what would become later a Newburyport Institution.

1958 was set to be the first time the Yankee Homecoming celebration would be conducted and no less than 29 cities agreed to hold the event.

George Cashman took the celebration one step further and made sure the festival would be a way to promote the city by encouraging those descendants who had roots here in Newburyport to return, and to make sure visitors understood the city's national significance. The Yankee Homecoming event would be held one week before the day the Coast Guard was born, August 4th. This was, I might add, years before Congress officially designated Newburyport, the Birthplace of the United States Coast Guard. Years passed and the invite was extended to include anyone who ever lived here, had ancestors here once or had visited Newburyport even once, therefore guaranteeing an expanding attraction for the event.

"I never really met someone who would give so much of themselves and put the needs of the city before anything else," said Dennis Palazzo, who has served as Yankee Homecoming's chairman of the board for the past three years. "Not only Yankee Homecoming, but all the endeavors he did. It was really inspirational to me."

George Cashman was a man of vision and pushed heavily for national recognition of Newburyport as the Birthplace of the U.S. Coast Guard. Once it was recognized by President Lyndon Johnson, this only added to the prestige and value of the festival which is why it is one

of the last cities in New England to host the event. Now, Yankee Homecoming IS Newburyport and George was known as Mr. Yankee Homecoming.

His greatest passion, however, was his family. This included Cashman's wife, Rosemary; his children William, Christine, George, Mark, Brian, Suzi, Rose, Joan and Catherine; and 16 grandchildren, as well as his brother John, and his sister Elizabeth.

"George was a great family man - the definition of a patriarch," said Sue Christ, who worked with Cashman on the Rotary and in local politics and is also a family friend. "He was always bigger than life, always knew who he was and where he was and what he wanted to accomplish. He had a very close-knit family and they looked up to him tremendously."

But he was a tremendous impact to the city. When he died in 2006, it was a tremendous loss to the people and city of Newburyport.

"We should all feel very good about what George Cashman did for us in Newburyport," Christ said. "Some people may not know how much he did for us, but as it starts to come out.....I think they'll see how much he will be missed."

He died December 29<sup>th</sup>, 2006 from liver cancer at his West End home. He was 81.

## References:

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