

Rich Tyler: A Legacy to Emulate

by Bill Simons, Secretary

On a cold winter night, Rich left us soon after helping to extricate a driver's stranded vehicle from the snow. He died as he lived—caring, compassionate, engaged.

Rich was devoted to community, good causes, and, above all, family. He was immensely proud of daughter Jess, noting that she was one of the few people equally adept with statistics and crafting the written word. For over 50 years, Rich and Loraine shared a remarkable love story — best friends, partners, parents, husband and wife. May indelible memories of special times provide a balm to Loraine, Jess, extended family, and friends as they move forward through this sad loss.

For my wife Nancy and I, one of the joys of summer was to meet Rich and Loraine by the pond at the Polar Bear for a specialty hamburger and ice cream. Summertime also included bucolic visits to the Tylers outside porch. A good storyteller and a good listener, Rich had a smile and laugh that set the world aright.

Generous with their time and energy, Rich and Loraine contributed to a range of benevolent organizations, amongst them UUP (United University Professions), the nation's largest higher education union. Rich was UUP Oneonta's longest serving and best treasurer. His home workshop, with tools neatly in proper place and nails and screws sorted by jar, provided the template for Rich's tenure as UUP Oneonta Treasurer and contributions to the Finance Committee. Rich was meticulous, thorough, exacting, and transparent. While I was UUP Oneonta president, Rich made sure we abided by the rules and accounted for every penny, ensuring that we always aced outside audits with flying colors and allotted funds for core

priorities. After his Chapter Treasurer reports, I would follow with, “Thanks, Rich, for keeping me out jail.” Retirement for Rich existed only in name: he remained Treasurer until the end.

A role model to other senior unionists, Rich received the Pearl H. Brod Outstanding Retiree Award from State UUP. I wrote the following in my recommendation supporting the award: “Rich spent a great deal of collaborative time with me constructing the proposed Chapter budget for the coming year. His presentations of the annual budget at the Executive Board meeting and the Chapter meeting exhibited his consistent clarity and responsiveness.”

Trying times provide a window to character. A devastating fire and explosion completely destroyed the Tylers’ new log-cabin home atop Franklin Mountain on Monday morning, March 26, 2012. Rich and Loraine had devoted hundreds of hours of their own physical labor and participated in all phases of the building of their “log-cabin” dream home. Many couples would have crumpled in the face of such a catastrophe. Instead, summoning courage and resolve, Rich and Loraine, assisted by a wide circle of friends, many of them UUPers, rebuilt their home and embarked on years of new adventures.

There was a New York Yankees right fielder named Tommy Henrich. On and off the baseball diamond, he did everything well — good batting average, solid power at the plate, heads-up base running, sure glove in the field, and accurate throwing arm. He was essential to the Yankees’ 1930s and 1940s dynasty. But due to his own modesty and the attention focused on his nonpareil teammate Joe DiMaggio, Tommy Henrich didn’t get a lot of publicity. Those who knew the game, however, understood the importance of Henrich’s contributions and nicknamed him “Old Reliable.” Rich Tyler was UUP Oneonta’s *Old Reliable*.



Rich Tyler, third from the right, always at the center of the UUP Team

For decades, Rich was always there. When UUP needed to assemble a squad to do SUNY advocacy, whether locally or at the state legislature in Albany, Rich — and Loraine — stepped forward. Many photographs of Oneonta UUPers meeting with legislators, particularly Senator Jim Seward and Assemblyman Bill Magee, include Rich. During UUP Oneonta’s long and ultimately successful fight for proper Labor Day observance on campus, Rich would invariably bring expertise to the raising and stabilizing of the large, heavy, canvas union tent in the quad. At Chapter social hours, now termed UUP Unplugged, it was Rich who lugged the oversize coffee cannister. When veteran unionist Joe Baldwin developed vision problems, Rich drove him to meetings. During Chapter cash-deposit events, Rich stood close to the entrance, making sure attendees received return of their outlay. He joined the welcome contingent at the main gate when UUP Oneonta, with NYSUT allies, sponsored a ballgame at Damaschke Field.

A major liaison to State UUP, Rich kept abreast of evolving fiscal rules emanating from Albany and beyond. His long service on the State UUP Finance Committee fostered a special

relationship between Rich and the late longtime State UUP Treasurer Rowena Blackman Stroud. Rich was well known in the chambers of several State UUP officers and professional staffers. And for years Rich participated as an Oneonta representative in the deliberations of the State Delegate Assembly, often joining a union picket line in Albany.

Math and teaching, individually and in tandem, provided Rich with enduring avocation and vocation. Figuring out math problems and then teaching others to do so appealed to him. Rich came to Oneonta as an undergraduate, and his teaching career deepened that relationship. A demanding and dedicated instructor, he gifted his knowledge and skills to a generation of math students. Colleague James York observed, “He was an absolute treasure as a coworker in the Math Department, where I would see him almost every day. We would often share our teaching experiences and thoughts about the world during our breaks between classes. His subtle sense of humor was combined with a genuine kindness and sharp mind. Rich will forever hold a special place in our memory as a quiet, friendly, and thoughtful spirit who contributed so much to the academic and professional facets of our college.” It is appropriate that a math puzzle book accompanied Rich to his final resting place.

Undoubtedly, Rich’s coming of age in the hamlet of Orange Lake on the outskirts of Newburgh, New York, contributed to his sense of community. Small-town neighborliness burnished his template. Naval duty highlighted Rich’s patriotism but also made him alive to the possibility of the capricious imposition of authority from on high. Rich’s service extended to the community. He was a stalwart of Habitat for Humanity and the philanthropic activities of the local religious community.

With quite strength and decency, Rich reminds one of Jimmy Stewart’s portrayal of George Bailey in the movie *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Union activist Dr. Betty Wambui reflects that Rich’s

“partnership [with] Loraine was a lesson in what loving friendship and service mean... His gentle, quiet, kindness and energy... [what] he gave to his Alma Mater and Union will continue to inspire.” Rich bequeaths a legacy to emulate.