

OBITUARIES

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Former Assemblyman Francis J. Pordum, 76, Southtowns' rep

By DALE ANDERSON

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Francis J. Pordum, who represented parts of Erie County's Southtowns and South Buffalo as a seven-term Democratic Assemblyman from 1982 to 1996, died Saturday in his home in Derby after a long battle with cancer. He was 76.

In Albany, he put forward measures to promote sport fishing in Lake Erie, to start the redevelopment process for the Bethlehem Steel plant site and to make Woodlawn Beach a state park.

He did not seek reelection in 1996 in order to run for the 30th District Congressional seat held by incumbent Rep. Jack Quinn, but lost in a three-way race.

At that time, then-Assembly Minority Leader Thomas M. Reynolds, a Republican, praised him as "hardworking."

"He always carried his load and then some as a member of the Western New York delegation," Reynolds said.

He later served one four-year term as Town of Evans supervisor.

Mr. Pordum's father died two months before he was born and, like his two brothers and his sister, he developed an appreciation for serving the public as he grew up helping his mother in the family delicatessen on Center Street in Lackawanna. They lived in an apartment behind the store.

He went to Canisius High School and spent two years at Manlius Military School, near Syracuse. He graduated from Colgate University in 1968 with a bachelor's degree in geology and earned a master's degree from the University at Buffalo.



He was a sixth-grade teacher and coach at McKinley Elementary School in Lackawanna from 1973 to 1980, when he took a leave to serve in the Erie County Legislature. His older brother Frederick had served in the Legislature previously.

In the Assembly, he was a member of numerous committees and chaired the Committee on Local Government. Among his concerns were

development and protection of Lake Erie and its shoreline.

He introduced bills prohibiting the application of pesticides on lawns in rain and high winds and requiring that signs be posted wherever pesticides had been used.

He worked to get gill nets banned in Lake Erie to create a sports fishery and sponsored legislation to establish a special \$3 stamp for sport

fishermen, with funds going to buy out the commercial fishermen who used gill nets. He helped establish the Harborfront Redevelopment Plan, which started the revival of the former Bethlehem Steel site.

He worked for 10 years to broker the deal to create Woodlawn Beach State Park and traveled to Washington, D.C., to get funding to rebuild the Sturgeon Point Marina.

He also developed a revolving loan fund to help emergency service agencies, funded a statewide program to improve farm safety and got more Amtrak train service to Buffalo. He also provided state funding to help expand what is now the 18 Mile Creek Golf Course in Hamburg to 18 holes. He was honored as Legislator of the Year by the New York State United Teachers and received the Fiscal Policy Institute's Bull Dog Award.

In a 1996 article about Mr. Pordum's tenure in the Assembly, Buffalo News reporter Barbara O'Brien noted that he "earned a reputation of working hard on the little issues that other legislators might not focus on."

"I think I gained a lot of respect from leadership and also from the executive," he told O'Brien then, "because they knew, if it was something that was proper to do, that I was not going to go away."

After leaving office, Mr. Pordum was associated with a political consulting firm in Albany for a year, then returned to the Lackawanna schools, first as a substitute teacher, then as a fifth- and sixth-grade instructor. He ran for the 12th District seat in the County Legislature in 1999 but lost to incumbent Jeanne Chase.

He was among the finalists under consideration for Lackawanna school superintendent in 2001 and, in a bid for his old Assembly seat in 2004, he was defeated by Jack Quinn III.

He was elected Evans town supervisor in 2007. In that post, he revised rules for Town Board meetings to allow more public comment, expanded park services, oversaw reassessment of all properties in the town and led an analysis of town expenses to minimize the need for tax increases. In a bid for a second term in 2011, he mounted an unsuccessful write-in campaign after losing the Democratic primary to Angola Mayor Howard M. Frawley Jr. Active with many community organizations, he was a longtime parishioner at the former St. Barbara's Catholic Church in Lackawanna.

An accomplished ballplayer, he was chosen as a regional all-star in the Mid Atlantic Regional Men's Fast Pitch Softball League and was inducted into the Western New York Softball Hall of Fame in 1985.

A longtime fan and fantasy baseball player, in recent years he enjoyed traveling with friends to see New York Yankees and Cleveland Indians games.

He and his wife, the former Rebecca Rolfe Mahoney, a teacher and former Maryvale School Board member, would have celebrated their 18th wedding anniversary today.

Survivors also include two daughters, Carolyn Portillo and Kimberly Mahoney; a son, Thomas Mahoney; a sister, Virginia Antos; a brother, Frederick; and four grandchildren.

A Memorial Mass will be offered at 10 a.m. Wednesday in Our Lady of Victory Basilica, Ridge Road and South Park Avenue, Lackawanna.