

Meet Mayor Andrew Parise, the Mayor of Cedarhurst

I had the pleasure and honor to meet Mayor Andrew Parise, the Mayor of Cedarhurst. This is the first time I met someone whose love of the Five Towns meets or even exceeds mine. A more apt name for Mayor Parise might be Papa, father, for his full-time devotion and dedication to the office of mayor. Clearly it is his pride in Cedarhurst that motivates him not the title or salary that goes along with the job.

Andrew Parise was raised with his five siblings in Inwood. He walked to his neighborhood school, #4 school on Wanser Avenue. It was 1929 the modes of transportation were foot or trolley car from Jamaica which snaked through the Five Towns. The Five Towns back then was mostly dirt roads which was one big bridle path with horses that could be rented from three stables. One was located on Peninsula Blvd which leads into Branch Blvd. at the Cedarpoint Golf Club. The other two were on West Broadway at Franklin Avenue and on Fair Oaks Place.

After high school and before entering the Army, Mayor Parise became engaged to his long time friend and neighbor, Lillian Oliviero. She waited for him to come out of the Army and they wed in 1945.



The Army was a life lesson for Mayor Parise, in his service to the people and country. He fought in the Battle of the Bulge and fought in France, Belgium and Luxemburg. A wartime memory that has lived vividly with the Mayor was his liberating Buchenwald. There was no one left living in the camp and as such there was no real need for the army to enter the camp. Nevertheless the army commanders required that all soldiers enter Buchenwald.

Parise said, “When we got to Buchenwald, there were no people left living...only open trenches and skeletons. So why did the Army make its soldiers enter Buchenwald? So they could forever be witnesses to the atrocities that Hitler and the Nazis perpetrated...they envisioned a time in the future, even as we see today, that there would be people who want to deny the Holocaust happened...it was up to the soldiers to be witnesses forever.”

At the Czechoslovakian border, Mayor Parise met up with the Russians and the war in Europe was over. He was sent to Fort Benning Georgia, where he was to have his 30 day recuperation period before going to Japan to finish the war. During these 30 days, he married his sweetheart Lillian. The bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and the war was over. The Mayor and his three brothers who also served in the military returned safely home from WWII. He was awarded a chest full of medals, including the Purple Heart for his bravery. The Five Towns is where he has lived ever since. Mayor Parise and his wife, Lillian, raised three children in Cedarhurst, Andrew, Jr., Louise Anne and David.

Post WWII was a decisive time for all of America. The technology that the U.S. had developed for the war was brought home and changed the landscape of the Five Towns. The horse stables, dirt roads and marshes were turned into housing for the soldiers who

returned to civilian life and wanted to start families in the suburbs. Central Avenue's diagonal parking was changed to the current parallel parking in favor of the families who could now afford automobiles.

Mayor Parise worked for 40 years for the Town of Hempstead as Chief of Staff. He became Mayor in 1995. Mayor Parise is very proud of the way the Village has flourished under his very capable hands. He takes great pride in enhancing the Village on a continual basis. The baseball diamond and magnificent jungle gym recreation area for the community in Cedarhurst Park were completed without the need to use residents' tax dollars but rather through private grants and donations. The highly popular summer concert series is similarly sponsored by private individuals, organizations and companies.

Cedarhurst is one of very few upper class neighborhoods with low residential taxes. The commercial tax basis and the private funding keep it that way. It takes a lot of time and effort fostering this private funding, but that's a job the Mayor takes on gladly for the benefit of the people he so proudly represents.

As the Mayor and I were reminiscing about the good old days, I asked him whether he would want to turn back the hands of time. He thought back to the days when his mother, Antoinette Occhiuzzo came to America from Italy in 1903, and his father came when he was 12...he remembered the days as a child in Inwood, when it was an "old fashioned hicktown...everyone had a vegetable garden...Jamaica Bay was clean and everyone was clamdiggers...when the Five Towns were all 'mom and pop' shops, to a time when JFK airport was still called Idlewild airport with very few planes...where you didn't buy kids toys, they made their own games up, like 'kick the can', Ringoleveo, sticks for stick ball...to a time when the Saturday night activity was having all the families on the block get together to talk and share food and just share...where everyone was devoted to their families...a time when everyone did community work and volunteered for the common good...a time where the community was small and everyone knew and cared about each other..." and he does miss that time in his life in the Five Towns...

Yet, he is personally proud in the growth of the Five Towns...and in his role as Mayor. What makes him most happy is his ability to provide for the individual residents. Mayor Parise told me that when he worked for the Town of Hempstead, he needed to go through the networks to get approval to help people and get things done, as Mayor, he can say "yes, and yes, and yes".

And so, like a father who never wants to say no to his children, wants to provide for them, for their comfort and security, at the end of each day, the Mayor leaves his office and winds his way through his extended home...Cedarhurst. He will note if there is a light missing on the street or in a store...notice if a store or public area is looking shoddy and needs a boost...notice if there is garbage strewn where it shouldn't be, and keeps his Cedarhurst the way he keeps his own home, with pride and security.

As our interview ended, his final comment to me was "I HOPE TO LEAVE THIS VILLAGE IN GOOD SHAPE AND IN GOOD HANDS".