

## **ONE LIFE IN LODI January 2008**

Louis C. Tucci by Artie Maglionico, Borough Historian

Louis C. Tucci has become, over the years, the quintessence of Lodi Pride and esprit de corps. His energetic approach toward the welfare of his community remains in tact even at 77 years of age.

Indeed the Tucci name has become part and parcel of Lodi history. . . Because of this the very fabric of the town is strengthened and ever growing.

Louis, or Lou as he is known to friends and family, was born in Lodi on July 16, 1930. His parents, Anthony and Elena, were born in Bergen County and were married on October 20, 1929. "My dad worked as a plumber," recalls Lou. "My mom stood home and raised our family."

After settling for awhile on Vreeland Street in Lodi, where Lou was born, the Tucci family moved to 163 Hamilton Avenue. There Lou and his brothers and sisters entered the main stream of the community. "We were all raised on Hamilton Avenue," says Lou. "My brother, Anthony H., and my sisters, Elena, Carolann and Patricia. . . We all grew up here."

All of the Tucci children attended the Columbus Grammar School located on Westervelt Place. Teachers of influence for Lou were Miss Sweeney, Miss Denzel and Miss Wolfe. "They were wonderful, caring teachers," boasts Louis. . . I'll never forget them." Lou graduated from Columbus School in June of 1944. His classmates included. . . Frank Sproveiro, Martin Infante, Marc Marino, Michael Sepede, Nick Diamico, Rudy Geisler, Nick Torre, Marie Mosca, Roseina Tabano, Audry Calabrese, Alice Helius, Marie Robie, Rosemary Stinzi, Sue Manna and Donald Vega.

"Most of the streets around Borig and Vreeland were yet unpaved," remembers Lou. That part of Lodi consisted of a scattering of homes and open fields. It was on those fields that the kids gathered to play baseball which at the time was not organized."

It was during that time, the early '30s when the Lodi High School Stadium was constructed. It was named after Mayor Cavallo. Also at that time Lou's grandfather built what was to be known as the Lodi Pool. "I was five years old," says Louis. The main entrance was on Hamilton Avenue and it stretched up to Keasler." One section of the pool offered a sandy beach where residents of Lodi and surrounding towns came to play. Located closer to Keasler Avenue stood refreshment stands, amusement rides, including a ferris wheel and locker rooms. On Sundays the pool featured bi-plane rides which, as the story goes, were not for the faint of heart. The plane would take off and land on the rock-littered fields along Linden Street. "The pool itself was the biggest of its time," recalls Louis. "Second perhaps to Palisades Park."

The pool property was lost during the depression only to be repurchased after WWII. Lou's grandfather, Louis F. Tucci, saw fit to tear down the pool and build a factory and two houses in its place. Today the factory is home to the local Portuguese Club. "My grandfather went on to build no less than 25 houses on those once empty lots on

Hamilton, Keasler and along Rt. 46," says Louis. "That part of town became known as Tucci territory."

Louis entered Lodi High School in September of 1944. He played freshman baseball under the watchful eyes of Coaches -- Stan Piela, Phil Niosi and Joe Cody. He later joined the track team which was coached by the ever popular Mr. Casmir Satkowski. "I was very laid back in Lodi High School," admits Louis. "I hung out with all the kids from Columbus. . . We really didn't expand. . . We stuck together."

During his teen years Louis became a member of the St. Joseph's Church CYO and was soon shooting hoops on the basketball team. He also excelled in track and field under the guidance of Pastor Father Achille. A young Father Gabrielle, who later became the church's much loved pastor, served as CYO moderator.

In those days the entertainment mecca in Lodi was the American Theatre. There. . . On a Sunday afternoon. . . A youngster could enjoy a double feature, a cartoon and a newsreel for a whopping 15 cents. If that wasn't enough the owners. . . The Basile Family. . . Gave away free dishes." I used to spend many a Sunday afternoon there with my sisters," remembers Louis.

In June of 1948 Louis graduated from Lodi High and by the following August found himself in the U.S. Army. He signed on with the 2nd Division 23rd Infantry installing telephone wire. Six months after boot camp the young soldier fractured his ankle while playing volley ball and spent the following 7 months in the hospital. "My outfit eventually got shipped to Korea," says Lou. "I stayed behind because of my injury."

On April 12, 1953, Louis married his childhood sweetheart, Mildred Geraci, of Autumn Street. The couple exchanged vows at St. Joe's Church and were married by Father Gabrielle.

"I worked with my grandfather until 1961," says Louis. "Then I started my own business as a general contractor."

Today Louis is an active member of the Paramus Elks Lodge 2001, St. Joseph's Parish, Knights of Columbus and is also a member of the Maywood Racquet Club where at age 77 plays tennis against guys in their 40's and wins.

The Paramus Elks Club recently voted Mr. Tucci Veterans Volunteer Chairman of the Year. Louis was picked out of 127 lodges state wide. "I get much satisfaction from helping our nation's war veterans," says Louis. "We can't do enough. . . Especially for the WWII vets. . . They saved our freedom."

Louis and wife, Mildred, have three children. . . Daughter, Paula Ann, who is married to Randy Rider, and sons, Louis Anthony, who is married to Linda Bowman, and David, the husband of Lisa Fontinella. The couple have 4 grandsons - Darryl, age 31; Chad, age 29; Sean, age 27 and Derek, age 24.

Lou is fast to admit that he loves the community of Lodi. "The people in town have always been good neighbors," he says. The diverse cultures make our community stronger and healthier still."

That Louis C. Tucci. . . One Life in Lodi. One dedicated citizen!