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Obituary: John M. Simon

John M. Simon, Former Glen Cove

Golf Course Director, Dies At 91

John Simon, native New Yorker and 52-year resident of Glen Cove, died Thursday, June 27, 2013, peacefully at home following a brief illness. He was 91 years old.

Simon was born in a tenement apartment in New York's Germantown in 1922 to Samuel Simon, a longshoreman, and Elizabeth Dichner, a Russian immigrant from the Ukraine.

During the Depression years, Sam and Elizabeth had five children and at the age of five, John, the middle child, with three of his siblings (Abe, Sylvia and Jeanette) were court-placed in the Hebrew Orphan Asylum on 138th Street in New York, joining many other orphans and destitute children. Jeanette Morrow, the youngest of the three was released shortly thereafter as a result of their mother's vigil at the judge's doorstep and his sister, Sylvia was placed in foster care. John remained at the asylum with his brother, Abe, until they reached the age of majority.

Simon attended Stuyvesant High School in Manhattan. Along with completing academic studies he belonged to the fencing and swimming teams. Upon graduation in 1940 he made his way to California with a \$50 loan. There he attended U.C.L.A. and studied drama. During those years, he appeared as a double for Billy Halop in several movies and acted in several U.C.L.A. stage productions.

However, Simon's Hollywood career was not to be. World War II broke out and immediately following the attack on Pearl Harbor he enlisted in the U.S.



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Army Air Force. In 1944 he was deployed to England and served as a gunner in the 435th Fighter Squadron. Along with wartime duties, he joined the Army boxing team and became the Seventh Service Welterweight runner-up.

While in East Anglia, England, Simon met his future wife, Vera Claireaux (Vicki Simon) at a U.S.O. dance. They were married in Ipswich in 1945 and after the war Vicki emigrated to the United States aboard a war bride ship, moving to New York's lower east side where Simon lived and worked while he attended City College of New York. They remained together as loving husband and wife until his death.

In New York, one of John's jobs as a parking attendant put him in contact with a partner of what would later become Gehring Textiles, a New York textile firm. He joined the firm in 1946 and eventually became Vice-President before leaving the firm in 1962. Mr. Simon was instrumental in the design and construction of Gehring's Tricot Fabricating Corporation in Dolgeville, New York and also their lace edge separation operation.

The next year saw the birth of unexpected twins, Deirdre and John. Shortly thereafter John and his family moved to New Hyde Park, and a few years later a second son, Claude, was born.

In 1962, Simon joined Native Textiles, another New York textile firm specializing in warp knits and worked his way up to President of the company. Eventually, he became president of Native where he designed many plain and fancy fabric constructions, manufacturing processes and control systems. During these years John and his family moved to Glen Cove.

In 1974, he left Native Textiles and formed his own warp knit textile company, Veratex, Inc. with offices on Madison Ave in New York City. In 1978, he was joined at Veratex by his sons, Claude and John C. His siblings Louis Simon and Sylvia Bruno were also employed there along with many dedicated and long-standing office managers and salespeople. John continued working there until his death last week. He commuted to Pennsylvania Station via Long Island Railroad virtually every day. At one time, Mr. Simon was the longest continuous monthly ticket holder on the L.I.R.R. (His dismay at passenger use of seats for footrests led to his design and guerrilla distribution of small warning stickers, "NO FEET ON THE SEAT!" Mr. Simon was very well known to and liked by conductors and fellow passengers.) The midtown streets of New York were like his second home where on any given day of the week he could be seen dressed impeccably in suit and tie. To tourists and locals alike John was always approachable.

One of the many important legacies John left behind was at the Glen Cove Golf Course, where John served as Commissioner for ten years. He began his association with the Golf Course first as a member, then as a Glen Cove Men's Golf Club Board member during which time he won three club championships in "C" class. He was appointed to the Golf Commission in 1992 as a Commissioner and then as the head of the commission and effectively the Executive Director of the course until 2002. Under the authority of former mayor, Tom Suozzi, Simon transformed the course from a struggling enterprise in poor physical and financial condition into a respected and highly praised public course and money-making machine for the city. Change is always contentious and Mr. Simon's frank and direct approach sometimes elicited criticism but his results could not be denied even by his detractors. His work engineered an unprecedented and unsurpassed period of maximized play and high revenue and profit for the city. According to Mr. Suozzi, "John made a valuable and remarkable contribution to the City of Glen Cove through his service at the Glen Cove Golf Course. Despite some resistance to change, John always tried to do the right thing and he succeeded."

Some of the many benefits and improvements Mr. Simon supervised were the renovation and reconfiguration of the course for better, safer and faster play.

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He invented and implemented a ticketing system to control play and monitor revenue. While some ridiculed the system and protested the tickets by hanging them on a tree at the 18th hole, their actions proved short-sighted as they witnessed the transformation of the course. Mr. Simon also engineered the renovation, preservation and repurposing of the golf course estate's old carriage house as a facility to house and maintain carts. Other innovations included the implementation of "twilight play" whereby golfers in the evening hours could play as many holes as they wanted for a single fee. He also devised early morning "cross play" at Glen Cove Golf Course whereby daybreak players were loaded onto the front and back nine simultaneously, effectively increasing the volume and speed of play during the first rounds of the day.

Meanwhile, in New York City, Simon became a founding partner in one of New York's first commercial coops at his company's headquarters in midtown Manhattan. He and his family eventually came to control the entire building which John managed until recently when it was sold as part of a large development project and subsequently demolished.

Throughout his years John remained strong and ambulatory but not without some medical aid. Under the care of long-time family physician Dr. Russell Samuel, John underwent many medical procedures in his life with aplomb, often returning to work on the same day. (Once, coming out of anesthesia for a heart surgery and late for a business meeting, he directed, "If anyone asks where I am, tell them I'm changing planes in Chicago.")

John is predeceased by beloved siblings, Abe Simon of Scarsdale, Louis Simon of New York, and Sylvia Bruno of Tenafly, New Jersey.

He is survived by and will be greatly missed by his wife Vicki Simon and his children, John C. Simon, Deirdre Dore and Claude Simon, and his sister Jeanette Morrow. He is also survived and greatly missed by grandchildren Forest Humphreys, Chloe Humphreys, John Z. Simon, Samantha Simon, Charles Simon and Henry Simon as well as generations of nieces, nephews, in-laws and friends who found John both exhilarating and inspirational.

The family is grateful to the Hospice of New York for their compassionate and professional help in easing his passage.

John's ashes will be interred at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington D.C. at a future date and family and friends will be notified.

Right up to the very end, John lived his life to the fullest, with no regrets. He had a generous, open heart, a dynamic, inquisitive intelligence and a great sense of humor. The family mourns his passing.

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