

Ken Dartley is fondly remembered

by Jeannette Ross
Editor

Ken Dartley, who died Aug. 17, is being remembered as a man who not only tirelessly served his community but also cultivated many friendships and cared deeply for his family. His friends and family will pay tribute to him at a wake on Tuesday, Aug. 30, from 4 to 8 p.m., at Hoyt Funeral Home in New Canaan. A service will take place Wednesday, Aug. 31, at 11 a.m. at Wilton Presbyterian Church with a reception to follow in the Parish Hall. "Ken Dartley was not one to stay idly at home. He was a man of action, serving as a selectman in a difficult time for his community, and always forthright and courageous in his point of view," said state Senator Toni Boucher of Dartley's service on the Board of Selectmen last fall. It was a contentious time when the board was working on approving the Miller-Driscoll construction bids.



Second Selectman Michael Kaelin served with Dartley and said if it were not for him, he would not be on the board at all. "When I resigned from the RTC (Republican Town Committee) in 2010, I had no intention of getting involved in town government," he said in an email to The Bulletin. "Ken would not let me go. He kept inviting me out to breakfast at Orem's and kept asking me to get involved. He overcame my resistance by convincing me of all the good 'we' could do and by his example of how much good he was doing. Ken has made Wilton a better place for everyone."

Dartley's influence extended well beyond politics and government. Next month marks the 10th anniversary of Army Pvt. Nick Madaras' death from an IED explosion in Iraq. Nick's mother, Shalini Madaras, remembered Dartley's role in forming Kick for Nick. "Ken's thoughtfulness and caring in wanting to fulfill Nick's wish to share the sport he loved with the children of Iraq, by sending a few soccer balls in Nick's honor and memory, has now expanded Kick for Nick Foundation into a global outreach program of friendship, with over 45,600 balls in the hands of children," she said. "We will always be grateful for this. Ken's passing is a tremendous loss for us and our board, his presence will be missed."

"He did so much for the town of Wilton, was a strong advocate for seniors and accomplished so much for the betterment of our community. As a member of the American Legion Post 86 in Wilton, Ken arranged to set up the Kick for Nick ball collection net on the Post's front lawn. It will always serve as a memorial to Ken's legacy." A member of American Legion Post 86, Dartley was an advocate for veterans, serving on the committee that established the Veterans Memorial Green.

Perhaps more visible was his advocacy for senior citizens. Dartley was instrumental in the founding of both Wilton Commons, affordable housing for seniors, and Stay at Home in Wilton, an organization that helps seniors live independently in their own homes. Joan Stair, a Stay at Home board member, described him as an "idea man" for his work on those and other projects. "Ken was like a bull in a china shop as an advocate for Wilton seniors," Starr said. "Along with the committee working for seniors he pushed for tax relief."

Phil Richards, a co-founder of Stay at Home in Wilton, said Dartley "encouraged us when we encountered problems and he established a key contact at our neighboring organization, Staying Put in New Canaan, leading to many years of helpful dialog. After we were in operation, he took the role of vice president, helping to set up many of our activities. As always, his fundamental motivation was how best can we support the senior citizens of Wilton."

Debbie McClelland, Stay at Home public relations coordinator, recalled a movie screening at the Wilton Senior Center in June. "We served ice cream sundaes. Janet [Johnson] and I went to clean up and found Ken in the kitchen all by himself doing the dishes. He really was a gem."

Gail Lavielle, one of Wilton's state representatives, said, "I admired Ken not just because of the wonderful work he did for our community, but especially because of the deep feeling he brought to it. If he decided to do something, he put his whole heart into it, and it literally kept him up at night. Sometimes he would call me in Hartford when we were on the House floor during the wee hours to ask a question, or to see if we could have coffee the next morning to discuss something that concerned him. No one was more devoted to Wilton, to advocating for seniors, or to honoring veterans."

Perhaps Dartley will be best remembered for the friendships he made during his 50 years living in Wilton. Toni Boucher said, "Ken was a close friend to me and to my husband, Bud, who enjoyed his Thursday night card games with Ken at Veterans Post 86 in Wilton, where they were both members."

Lavielle said, "Although I first met Ken 14 years ago through the RTC, I have always thought of him as a friend who was interested in government and politics, not as a political colleague who was also a friend." She said he thought "constantly" about his friends and related a story that involved her husband, Jean-Pierre. "A few years ago, he decided that Jean-Pierre, who is French and knows nothing about American sports, had to learn to enjoy baseball. So he took him to a game, made sure he had a hot dog, and gave him a full

running commentary. Afterwards, Jean-Pierre, who came back with a baseball cap, said, 'Well, I don't know what they were doing out there. It looked like they were just standing around. But I had a wonderful time with Ken! Ken was a gentleman. He was honest and trustworthy. He had a strong and fair sense of justice, of right and wrong. He was proud of his family — his wife, his son and daughter-in-law, and his grandchildren — whom he adored. I will miss him and remember him with great affection. And I wish much peace to his wonderful family.'

Boucher concurred. "Bud and I will sorely miss Ken's friendship. His community will miss his activity and participation. We are all indebted to Ken and send our deepest condolences to his family, and his lovely grandchildren."

Reflecting on all he did for Wilton, his friend Alex Ruskewich said, "It is only in the last three years that he started doing something for himself, spending more time with his grandchildren who he loved immensely. As a friend I will miss Ken, and believe the town of Wilton, which he loved, will miss him as much."