

Boston honors favorite son Ray Flynn

By Michael Quinlin

Ray Flynn has been called a lot of names in his time.

He is Mr. Ambassador in diplomatic and religious circles.

He is Mayor Flynn in the halls of government, and before that state representative and city councilor Flynn.

On the basketball court, his old nickname, "Shooter," still applies from when he was a standout at Providence College.

But here in Boston, in the coffee shops and bakeries, in local parks and on his neighborhood streets, he is simply Ray. And that is the way he likes it. Flynn is a modern day everyman, an ordinary guy from the neighborhood who has lived an extraordinary life.

He followed his ambitions around the world, cavorting with popes and presidents, but also standing with ordinary folks, calling for social and economic justice, bucking the system to help fix the system.

"Ray was the first big-city mayor to take an active interest in Northern Ireland," says New York attorney and human rights advocate, Brian O'Dwyer, who has worked closely with Flynn over the past thirty years.

"He helped spawn a new generation of young politicians who identify themselves as Irish American and who are not outside the mainstream."

O'Dwyer cites New Yorkers like U.S. Congressman Joe Crowley and Christine Quinn, former Speaker of the New York City Council, as the type of Irish American politician modeled on Flynn's ethnic-American populism.

The same is true in Boston.

Jack Hart, former State Senator from South Boston, is proud to be a Flynn



Ray Flynn with his grandchildren.

protégé.

"Having campaigned for him in my younger years, I so admired Ray Flynn," says Hart, now a successful attorney.

"With a longshoreman father and an adoring mother who scrubbed the floors of the downtown business offices, Ray's values were shaped by the simple eloquence of their example.

"Through his parents, he held strong family values, empathy for the working man and he understood intimately the struggles of families throughout the city no matter where they lived. And he stood as the mayor who would be their champion."

Eugene O'Flaherty, Corporation Counsel for the City of Boston and a former state representative from Chelsea, cites Flynn's "political courage" as one of his enduring legacies.

"My affinity for Ray Flynn in politics grew when I saw how much he was willing to take on," O'Flaherty says.

"As mayor, he took on racial integration in the neighborhoods and made Boston

a much more receptive place for immigrants and newcomers. His work on behalf of the north of Ireland was tremendous."

Throughout his political career, Flynn carried himself like the pedigree athlete who elevated his game when he reached the big arena, always willing to make the final shot to win the championship game. He took his victories with modesty, his defeats with grace.

In fact, Flynn, who was voted Best All-Around Athlete to every come out of South Boston, used his love of sports to help Boston heal in the wake of a racial divide exacerbated by forced busing.

"Ray became mayor on the heels of a turbulent decade for our city," says State Representative Kevin Honan.

"He was able to bring our city together by leading from the neighborhoods. His dedication to youth sports, which brought kids together at an early age to learn from each other and build relationships, was incredibly impactful.

"He healed this city and laid the foundation for Boston becoming a city of diversity, opportunity and respect."

SOUTHIE TO THE CORE

"Ray has always had a burning passion for the underdog and loves to take on the big opponents," says Boston City Councilor Bill Linehan, who worked in the Flynn Administration at City Hall and grew up in South Boston.

"His gritty Southie upbringing and Irish blood drove him to be part of some amazing times and action. He is a true Irish-American success story."

Southie is still Ray's home town. It is the town he loves so well, the neighborhood where his parents, Stephen and Lillian, toiled and raised a good family.

Ray and his wife Cathy still live in the modest house where they raised their six children, who all live nearby. He dotes on his grandchildren, watches their hockey games, attends their confirmations, and takes them out for ice cream.

It is entirely fitting therefore that the City of Boston has undertaken steps to honor him along the South Boston waterfront, not far from where he grew up. In February, the City of Boston renamed

the 191-acre Boston Marine Industrial Park to henceforth be called the Raymond L. Flynn Marine Park. An official dedication is being planned for later in the spring.

In making the recommendation to the Boston Redevelopment Authority, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh wrote, "We can think of no better way to celebrate Mayor Flynn's legacy of social and economic justice than to name the area where his father, his brother, and indeed, Mayor Flynn himself worked as members of the international Longshoreman's Association.

"Under Mayor Flynn's administration," Walsh continued, "the Park blossomed from a nearly abandoned site to a robust industrial park providing thousands of jobs and an anchor for the marine industry on Boston's waterfront."

The impetus to honor Flynn has been building for years and came from a wide spectrum of friends, admirers and former staffers who had worked with Flynn throughout his political career.

In October, 2014, the Boston City Council passed an order to create the Raymond L. Flynn Commission, and appointed a panel of commissioners to seek public input on the most suitable way to honor one of Boston's most popular mayors.

Co-chairs Francis J. Doyle and Rosemarie Sansone, once top aides to Mayor Flynn and now successful Boston business leaders, spent a year soliciting input from people across the city.

They held a public hearing in May 2015 that drew more than 150 people, along with oral and written testimony for dozens more.

The report, entitled "Building Bridges," was sent to Mayor Walsh and City Councilor Linehan on December 30, 2015.

In addition to renaming the park in Flynn's honor, the commission also recommends creating a visitor center, a multi-purpose facility that would welcome the 300,000 plus cruise ship passengers who use Massport's Cruiseport Boston each year, plus other visitors coming to the bustling Seaport District. The Center would contain a permanent exhibition called "Governing Boston, 1822-Present," a look at the political, social and economic history of Boston through the experience of its mayors.

Supporters of the idea say a visitor's center would serve a tangible need in this busy part of Boston, one of the city's fastest growing neighborhoods.

And in keeping with the spirit and legacy of Ray Flynn, such a center would serve as a beacon of light to any and all newcomers making their way to Boston, looking for a friendly welcome.

The fact that the park is in South Boston is an added bonus to Flynn's admirers.

Jack Hart had this to say of Ray Flynn, "South Boston to his marrow and decent to the core. Ray Flynn's name on the Boston Marine Industrial Park is a fitting tribute. Bravo!"

Find more information at bostonredevelopmentauthority.org.



Flynn with the late Ted Kennedy.



A politician is always making pitches.



As U.S. Ambassador to the Vatican with Pope (now Saint) John Paul.