

GROWING UP ON FAIRPORT'S NORTH SIDE:

A CONVERSATION WITH MATTHEW J. DIRISIO, JR.

Last of three columns

During several conversations with Matthew DiRisio, he spoke of his childhood growing up in Fairport.

School, particularly high school, was a good time for Matthew DiRisio, Jr. He was quarterback for the high school football team and consequently a hero in the Italian community. Perhaps even more importantly, he was a good student. And it was expected that he would get good grades. Florence Stolt, French teacher and of the Italian community, was, according to DiRisio, one of his particular favorites. He remembers her giving him money for his senior trip (with the explicit expectation that he repay it) because he had not raised sufficient funds for the trip by selling dish towels and moth cakes. He also remembers her as an elegant and successful professional woman, which was fairly unusual for the time and place in which he grew up. Joe Cummings, his football coach, was also significant in Matt's life, he says. He understood Matt, at one point stepping in to take him to a father-son communion breakfast in the absence of his father. Coach Cummings was always out looking for the boys when the team curfew was in effect. One time Matt and his friends figured that they could safely go to Uncle Hawk's restaurant and not be found. The coach, however, was waiting for them when they arrived at the restaurant past curfew. It was nearly impossible for Matt and his friends to be anonymous in the community. The presence of Coaches Cummings and Paddock, teachers Florence Stolt, John Clarke, and Grace Dubendorf, as well as a large family and tight-knit community helped a bright but headstrong young man who liked to push the envelope grow up successfully.

Matt DiRisio graduated from Fairport High School and went on to college and graduate school, eventually earning his doctorate. He taught social studies for four years in Henrietta before becoming an assistant principal. His maternal grandfather (who had taken him to the library as a child and who wanted to be a professor) wept with pride when he saw his grandson's vice principal name plate on the door in Rush-Henrietta. He went on to become high school principal at Onondaga Central School near Syracuse, and then served as principal at Churchville-Chili High School. Before retiring and returning to Fairport where he is currently school board president, Matt was Superintendent of Schools in Lyons; Locust Valley, Long Island; and Gananda. Back in his home town, he often speaks to community groups about growing up in Fairport. He notes that he has always liked to be in charge. He did it as the older son in the family, as a high school quarterback, as a principal and superintendent, and now as the president of the Fairport School Board.

Today Matthew DiRisio looks back at his childhood as a time of struggle, laughter, difficulty, and the need to be resilient. He believes that those hard times along with the people who helped him along the way, gave him the chance to live an honorable life. He certainly has done so.



Matthew DiRisio, Jr. in 1944



Dr. Matthew DiRisio, Jr. in 2007

