

Anthony Castellani, Well-Known Avon Builder, Dies At 84



Anthony Castellani married his wife Felicia, in October 1953. (Courtesy of the Castellani Family)

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AVON — Anthony "Tony" Castellani, a lifelong Avon resident known for the fine homes he built throughout the Farmington Valley, died on July 26. He was 84.

Castellani was born in 1929 and grew up on Old Farms Road on the family's chicken farm.

He married Felicia Kancler in 1953, and the couple had three children: Robert, David and Beth. Tony Castellani was predeceased by his oldest son, Robert.

"He was very focused, hardworking, quiet in some ways and also a storyteller," said Castellani's son David. "Once he got sort of wound up, he could tell stories for hours."

One was how, at age 5, he escaped the 1944 Hartford circus fire, in which at least 168 people were killed. David said his father was sitting close to the top of the bleachers with his cousin when the fire started.

"There was a rush to the gates, and he actually had the presence of mind to say, 'We're going to go the other way.' So they escaped — they jumped from the top of the grandstand and slipped under the tent."

David Castellani said that college was never an option for his father, so at age 16, he took up an apprenticeship under a carpenter.

"At 19, he built three houses before going to war," he said.

Castellani joined the U.S. Army Reserves in 1952, and just a few weeks later he was put on active duty for the Korean War. During that time, he was stationed in Chicago and fell in love with the city.

"Here's a guy who spent his time on a farm. The biggest city he ever saw was Hartford," David Castellani said. "And here he is in Chicago, which was the second largest city at that time."

He said his father sent his paychecks home to his mother, and when he returned to Avon two years later, he'd saved \$4,000, which was enough to start a building business with his younger brother Bernard.

"They first started building houses in Avon, but later on they'd amassed enough money to buy a parcel of land in Simsbury," David Castellani said. He said that some of the streets in Simsbury are named after family members.

"They did everything — they bought this farm, they literally cut the trees to make the roads," he said. "He was an architect and a superb mathematician ... When I say those guys did it all, it wasn't just swinging the hammer, they did the architectural work, the design, the build, and the business component."

David explained that his father, who would work seven days a week, took pride in his craftsmanship and to this day, his homes are still branded as Castellani-built.

"I once asked him how many houses he'd built," David Castellani said, though his father said it didn't matter. "There wasn't any false pride about how much stuff he did. He has this passion for quality, but it was his job. So in other words, he didn't think of himself as an artist. He was very humble."

Even after retiring in his late 40s, he continued to get phone calls to build houses and would do odd jobs into his 70s, his family said.

Castellani was an avid golfer and member of the Golf Club of Avon. He belonged to the Prince Thomas of Savoy Society of Avon and during retirement spent half the year in Florida.

David Castellani said he father enjoyed going outside to split wood and had a habit of waking up early in the morning. He recalled a time when he had been out all night and returned home just before his father woke up.

"My father said, 'Oh you're up, let's go split some wood.' And we split wood until noon. As we went back to the house, he said, 'You know, I wasn't born yesterday — go to bed,'" he said. "He had a way of pulling your leg and making a point at the same time. He was a great dad."

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