

John J. Rigas died on September 30, 2021 at UPMC Cole Hospital in Coudersport, Pennsylvania with his children at his side.

Born in an apartment above the Texas Hot in Wellsville, New York on November 14, 1924, John was the son of Greek immigrants and the oldest of four children. He spent his childhood, adolescence, and early adulthood in Wellsville. A very active participant in the life of Wellsville's small Greek enclave, he was also embraced by the larger community, enjoying friendship with all ethnic groups and social classes in the Village. His playgrounds were Wellsville's streets, alleys, rooftops, and make-shift ballfields. He forever cherished the memories of his childhood in Wellsville.

While John was a good student in school, what really distinguished him were his popularity and natural leadership traits. He was elected Class president all four years, and as a senior, student council president as well. Only 5' 4 ½" tall at most, he excelled as a high school athlete, in baseball, track, basketball and football. He was ultimately elected to the Wellsville Athletic Hall of Fame.

John's life in Wellsville was enhanced by his family's ownership of the Texas Hot Restaurant. He was completely at home amidst the clatter of dishes, the barking out of food orders, and the cacophony of chattering voices. The many hours spent there helped develop his appreciation of people from all walks of life and his love of informal conversation. He frequented the Texas Hot and many other diner-style restaurants throughout his life, often conducting business in them.

Immediately after graduating from high school in 1943, John was drafted into the army. He was selected for the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which was designed to groom young men as officers, something which brought him pride the rest of his life. He began instruction at Indiana University in Bloomington. As American casualties mounted, however, the US military effort needed combat soldiers and the ASTP members were called into action. Assigned to the 20<sup>th</sup> Armored Division, John and his fellow ASTP soldiers were shipped to Europe after D-Day. They then swept across France and Germany and into Austria on foot and in half tracks. They participated in numerous battles, including one of the last battles of WW II on the Western Front, just outside of Munich against SS troops. The Division also took part in the liberation of the

German concentration camp at Dachau. In August of 1945, when the dropping of atomic bombs forced Japan to surrender, John was in California preparing for the invasion of the island country.

Although initially reticent about his military experiences, in later years he opened up about them, telling stories which obviously had special meaning for him. He made generous contributions to veteran programs, particularly those involving the 20<sup>th</sup> Armored Division.

Upon discharge from the Army, John attended college on the GI Bill at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York, where several of his friends from the Greek community were already enrolled. Although lacking a high aptitude for engineering, after four years of hard work and a stint as fraternity president, he graduated in 1950 with a degree in management engineering.

John first tried his hand at the Texas Hot back in Wellsville, but he soon found that while he loved the people and the atmosphere there, he lacked the cooking skills of his father and the patience to be tied to a grill. Besides, he wanted to go into business for himself.

The opportunity arose in 1951 when a small movie theater came up for sale in Coudersport, Pennsylvania, a village about 30 miles south of Wellsville. Knowing nothing about the movie business but backed financially by the Wellsville Greek community, he took a chance and made the purchase. Seventy years later, the Coudersport Theatre was still running under his direction, maintained for decades not as a profitable business venture but out of sentiment and for its value to the local community.

Another business opportunity arose a year later when an RKO film salesman from Pittsburgh took it upon himself to convince John that he should look into a new technology appearing in small remote towns across Pennsylvania: wires running from television sets in homes to towers and antennae mounted on nearby hillsides, allowing these homes to receive television signals that were otherwise unavailable to them, something being called "community antenna television," or simply "cable tv." John, looking at his financial situation, initially dismissed the idea. But the salesman persisted, and John, wanting to get the salesman off his back, finally agreed to make a call to the current owner of the franchise. Much to his surprise, and chagrin, the owner agreed to sell. Taking

another chance, and drawing down all his reserves, John wrote a check for \$300. At 27, he was now a pioneer in a brand-new industry. He proceeded to construct the Coudersport cable system in partnership with a group of prominent local businessmen.

In 1956, along with his brother Gus, John was awarded the cable television franchise for his hometown of Wellsville. During the 1960's and early 1970's, the Rigas brothers won franchises for a number of communities throughout Western Pennsylvania, and then purchased cable systems in Latrobe-Ligonier, Pennsylvania and Niagara Falls, New York.

By 1972, John had long since given up engineering positions he had held to supplement his income from the fledgling cable companies, first at Sylvania in Emporium, Pennsylvania and then at Air Preheater in Wellsville. He was now a fulltime cable operator. With systems totaling 24,000 subscribers generating \$2.5 million in annual revenues, the Rigases incorporated their properties under the name "Adelphia," the Greek word for brothers. John served as Chairman, CEO, and President of the new corporation, titles he held until his departure from Adelphia in 2002.

Over the next thirty years, Adelphia's growth accelerated, the company doubling in size numerous times. By early 2002, Adelphia, public since 1986, was the nation's sixth largest cable television company, serving 6 million customers nationwide, and in Puerto Rico, Brazil and Venezuela, with attractive clustered assets in Los Angeles, Cleveland, Buffalo, West Palm Beach-Dade, Pittsburgh, and Vermont. A subsidiary, Adelphia Business Solutions, delivered telecommunications services to businesses throughout the country. The company had an appraised value of \$30 Billion and employed 20,000 people, 2,000 of them in Coudersport alone (As of 1979, there were only 7 employees in Coudersport). The company, moreover, enjoyed an excellent reputation for delivering quality customer service, for its advanced broadband networks, for the variety and number of services it provided, for its involvement in community affairs and for the overall morale of its work force.

John was a member of the National Cable Television Association (NCTA) board for two different terms. He also served as director and President of the Pennsylvania Cable Television Association. He is a member of the Cable Pioneers

Hall of Fame, the Broadcasting and Cable Magazine Hall of Fame, and the Pennsylvania Cable Television Hall of Fame. He received the cable industry's highest award, the NCTA Vanguard Award for Leadership, in 2000. He was honored at the prominent Walter Kaitz Foundation Dinner in 2000.

A lifelong lover of professional and college sports, in the early 1990's John was becoming increasingly aware that Buffalo lacked the media sports coverage of other urban areas. As a result, he conceived and founded Empire Sports Network to fill the void, with Buffalo Sabres NHL games as the anchor product. When the Sabres organization needed money to build a new arena, Adelphia invested money to help the project. A few years later, owners of the Sabres franchise, the Knox family, chose to exit the hockey business. John, recognizing how important the Sabres were to Buffalo, stepped up to assume ownership of the team and ensure their continued presence in the City. Adelphia, the Rigases, and the State then collaborated to create jobs for Western New York and develop the Lake Erie waterfront. As of 2002, 1200 of the 2,000 jobs Adelphia/Rigas had promised were already in place.

John's leadership also had a hugely positive impact on Coudersport and surrounding areas. He served on the board of Charles Cole Hospital for at least twenty years, most of them as Chairman. During this period, he was a familiar figure at the hospital, continually engaging medical staff, administrators, and frontline employees in discussions about how to improve working conditions and patient service. He worked unceasingly to recruit more doctors. He was instrumental in transforming the hospital from a small-town facility of generalists to a semi- regional institution staffed with specialists.

John sat on the board of Citizen's Trust Company from the late 1960's to 2002, many of these years as Chairman. This institution likewise experienced significant growth and prosperity during his tenure. In the 1950's, as President of the Chamber of Commerce, he played a lead role in attracting the Pure Carbon Company (now Morgan AMT) to Coudersport.

John also served as a Trustee on the Boards of St. Bonaventure University and Mansfield State University. He was a member of the Coudersport Rotary Club for more than 40 years. He was a long-time member of the Christ Episcopal Church vestry, serving as Senior Warden and Church Treasurer for nearly 4

decades. A member of the Eulalia Blue Lodge and the Coudersport Consistory, he was a 33<sup>rd</sup> degree Mason. He coached youth baseball in both Wellsville and Coudersport. He led March of Dimes fundraising drives. Together with his wife Doris, he increased the beauty of Coudersport and the surrounding countryside.

John's generosity in the Coudersport area and beyond became legendary. He, his family and Adelpia made large monetary contributions to a variety of projects and organizations: the Coudersport Fire Department, the Lady of Justice project, the Rigas Family Theater at St. Bonaventure, The Coudersport Consistory, the Greek Orthodox Church and the National Cable Center and Museum to name just a few. He encouraged Adelpia employees to support community projects and to donate time and resources whenever possible. Beyond this, so much of John's philanthropy was made quietly or even anonymously to individuals and families in need, many of whom he did not know, to people who needed money to educate a child or start a business or travel to see a dying relative or rebuild after a fire or pay taxes or renovate a storefront or purchase a house or meet their payroll or pay for a medical procedure. He never asked for anything in return. He often said he was more interested in extending a helping hand than seeing his name on a building.

For all of John's career accomplishments, his life centered on family. On February 1, 1953, John married Doris Nielsen of Penn Yan, New York, a schoolteacher in Wellsville whom he had first met during college. Doris provided strong and loving support for 61 years, unwavering in her commitment whether times were good or more challenging. Using her formidable talents and energy, mainly behind the scenes, she worked tirelessly and unselfishly to further the goals of her husband and family. The couple raised their three sons and one daughter in Coudersport, always making the children their number one priority. Whenever traveling on business, John would do whatever he could to return home—oftentimes late at night—in order to be with his family. Throughout his life, he maintained a keen interest in his children's activities and pursuits, regardless of their location or positions. In later years, John and Doris found profound joy in the lives of their grandchildren.

Through the years, John was always quick to point out that he was fortunate to have happened into an industry with a tremendous future. Yet, he

was astute enough to recognize its vast potential, and tenacious enough to stick with it for the long haul. He never gave up when confronted with obstacles. He placed great faith in cable television and he remained optimistic even during temporary downturns. He was a hands-on operator who paid attention to details and who was eager to please customers. His sincerity and kindness put people at ease and gained their trust, often becoming the difference maker in winning franchises, securing loans, or being chosen as a buyer.

Whether working in the business world or in the non-profit sector, serving the community or building his beloved Wending Creek Farms, John's leadership skills were evident. Endowed with a creative and prolific mind, he was a man of vision and imagination who always strove for excellence. He had an unquenching desire to improve things; he insisted that projects be done well and with sufficient resources. "Let's not skimp," he would say, "let's do it right."

Yet John's humanity tempered purely financial considerations or any arbitrary goals. He talked and listened to employees at all levels, without regard to financial or educational status. Friendliness, openness, and respect were extended to all. He was tolerant and forbearing of peoples' shortcomings, quick to forgive and slow to fire. He believed in second and third chances. He encouraged cooperation and fostered unity. He made people feel proud to be part of an organization, instilling a culture that saw the goal of business to be something more than just watching the bottom line.

John and the Rigas Family's accomplishments at Adelphia came to a tragic end in 2002 when the company was accused of financial irregularities. That year, he was indicted by the federal government and in 2004, found guilty. John fervently and unwaveringly believed that the government's portrayal of what occurred at Adelphia was a gross distortion of reality and the result at trial a huge miscarriage of justice. He was tremendously disappointed that this view was never adopted by the courts, but he took great solace in the fact that the people who knew him best never lost their faith in him or stopped extending their love and respect.

John served 8 ½ years of his 12-year sentence in three different federal prisons. He was released under compassionate release on February 22, 2016.

Defying the prognosis of doctors, he lived another 5 ½ productive and meaningful years. He remained an optimist until the very end.

While imprisoned, John continued where he had left off in freedom--befriending all, dispensing wisdom and wit, and inspiring hope. He left with legions of new admirers.

John was preceded in death by his wife Doris on December 10, 2014; by his brother Constantine ("Gus") Rigas (Rheba) of Wellsville, New York; and by his sister Mary (James) Hastas of Olean, New York.

John is survived by his sister Katherine (William) Pallas of Naples, Florida; by three sons, Michael Rigas, Timothy Rigas, and James Rigas, all of Coudersport, Pennsylvania; one daughter, Ellen Rigas Venetis, of New York, New York; by a daughter-in-law, Mary Ann (James) Rigas of Coudersport; a son-in-law Peter (Ellen) Venetis of New York; and six grandchildren, Christopher (Melanie) Rigas of New York, New York; John Michael Rigas of New York; Andrew Rigas of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; David Rigas of New York; Elias Venetis of New York; and Hallie Rigas of Coudersport, Pennsylvania; and many nieces and nephews.

There will be a private funeral service for family members. In the spring or summer, there will be a memorial celebration for the public. In lieu of flowers, contributions in memory of John may be made to the Patterson Cancer Center at 1001 East Second Street, Coudersport, PA 16915; the 20<sup>th</sup> Armored Division (details to be provided);, the Coudersport Volunteer Ambulance Association at 122 East 2nd Street, Coudersport, PA 16915; or a charity of the donor's choice.