

Good Morning.

For the past 36 hours or so, I've tried to get a handle on where to even begin to talk about a man who lived such a life. A husband, a father, a grandfather, a teacher, a coach, a guidance counselor, a public servant, a Councilman, a Freeholder – our Mayor.

Richard A. Mola was all of these things and so much more – to so many.

For those of you who have ever visited the Mayor's Office, you know there are five quotes which hang on the wall right outside the office door.

Each of these quotes guided the man's career in life and public service.

The first is...

***“If you want to know your family history – run for office.”***

Well we won't talk about that, but I will talk about family.

Richard Mola adored – and I mean adored his partner in life, his teammate, his best friend, his wife – Geri. 53 years of marriage, partnership, dedication to a community, shared discussions and true

love. Mrs. Mola, I've seen firsthand how difficult the past 14 days have been and we all know how deep your loss is. We pray, you will find peace in knowing these past five decades of memories and love will fill your heart and carry you forward with him always by your side.

As much as he adored his wife, he equally adored his three daughters – Stacy, Jill and Melissa. He was proud of each you, of the women you've become and the families you are raising. He also often spoke of his son-in-laws Kevin and Peter. Kevin, I know last season you took him to a Giants game. Thanks for that, because for the following week, all I heard was how it was better to watch a football game at home on TV, rather than at MetLife Stadium. And to Peter and Melissa, Galloway is far, very far. I often felt he believed if he were out of Elmwood Park for too long, other than on the annual vacation to Aruba of course, he'd at best turn into a pumpkin or at worst turn into a Democrat. And by the way, Galloway is approximately 120 miles, each way, as I was often reminded.

And to his two young granddaughters, Devin and Julia Ruth. Your grandfather was so proud and often spoke of your talents. As a matter of fact, he was beaming with such pride when you performed in the Broadway play "Tappin Thru Life." He actually took your autographed Playbill from office to office throughout the entire Municipal Building, twice, bragging about you both.

And then, there was the arrival of Peter Richard. This was a BIG deal. Oh my gosh, there was finally going to be a boy in the family. We all

heard about his love of superman and of course where his name came from. And he was overjoyed just the same with the arrival of Milana.

Mayor Mola loved each of you very much and it showed every day in the memories he shared and the stories he told.

And to his secretary, Pat Burke, who was just like family. Mayor Mola valued your assistance, your loyalty and your friendship.

The second quote on the wall reads...

***“Character is doing the right thing when no one is looking.”***

Richard Mola was a man of character, faith, principals and fairness. Hard work is what created years of success in governing a town and a county so steadily and effectively, that he was returned to office 12 times as Mayor and served for over two decades as a Bergen County Freeholder. A person does not earn the trust and confidence of the people he serves without those qualities and virtues which he exhibited every day.

Not only was Mayor Mola a public official, but an Army Veteran, and a tremendous athlete playing both baseball and football. His athletic background and competitive nature stayed with him right up until the night before he fell ill. He had been out putting up lawn signs and knocking on doors competing, not for runs or touchdowns – but for votes in the upcoming election, just like he had for the past 50 years. He was a teacher and a coach, not only in the classroom and on the athletic



field, but also in molding new candidates and ultimately public officials as to how to do the right thing for the people of this great community.

Mr. Mola, as he was known there, was long time guidance Counselor at Ridgefield Park High School. He touched so many young lives. It's funny because when our school board in Woodland Park hired our new Superintendent of Schools, she and I were talking one day and I had mentioned the Mayor's name. Her face lit up and she exclaimed, "He was my high school guidance counselor!" And I can't tell you how many of his former students over the years stopped in to say hello at Borough Hall and catch up with Mr. Mola.

The next quote on the wall is...

***"Everything is new if you are ignorant of history."***

So let's talk history. How did Richard Mola embark on this journey? Two words: Barry Goldwater. Believe it or not, a younger, not too outspoken man was outraged way back in 1964 about the East Paterson Republican Club not placing a sign in their window in support of Goldwater. He tracked down the President of the Club at the time and let them know his feelings. And not very long after that he, himself became the President of the East Paterson Republican Club. Just a few years later he was elected to the Council and in 1971 he was elected Mayor of East Paterson, being sworn in January 1972.

He was so thrilled when he often said that he was both the Mayor of East Paterson and the only Mayor of Elmwood Park! He was equally pleased



that he had the opportunity to govern under both forms of government as a Bergen County Freeholder, having served both as Freeholder Director and as Chairman of the Board.

He governed, based on experience. He knew what would work and what wouldn't and why. He had the pulse of Elmwood Park, and a familiarity with the residents that was second to none. In meetings, he would try to counsel, the Council on their decisions based on a long history of having tried this or succeeded with that.

He often used the term unintended consequences. And as a Mayor myself, that term became more important as the years went on. Weigh out the short term and long term effects of any decision, he would say. And without the benefit of a crystal ball, he'd almost be able to predict the future. It was unique talent, but one I hoped to have learned and carry with me from him. He firmly believed that history could help determine the future.

The next quote is my favorite...

***If they don't have the money, they can't spend it."***

(that one, was his own quote from a Freeholder meeting)

Mayor Mola held true to a philosophy. And in his case a conservative philosophy, which was a pillar of his success. He never wavered from his beliefs and values, but rather carried it out with compassion and a caring nature. Right was right and wrong was wrong. In most of our discussions, which I often attempted to limit, mostly unsuccessfully

about national politics, I was quickly advised that I was wrong. Or if we agreed, I was told I was in the wrong party. Either way, I was wrong. Over the years we developed a pretty honest and frank relationship. One day, maybe a year and half ago he was telling me something and I responded, "I hear ya, Mayor." He called me out and said, "You know when you say that, it really means you don't agree." I looked up from my computer and said, "Pretty much."

Even while we often joked, he also valued his employees. He appreciated each and every one of them for the services they provided the residents and the loyalty they always showed to the Borough of Elmwood Park.

Dick Mola was a true fiscal conservative and a great steward of the taxpayer's money. He believed in a steady hand and governed accordingly.

The final quote reads...

***"Character can never be irrelevant as long as government involves trust."*** – Thomas Sowell

In today's day and age and in the midst of the national campaign that is unfolding, it's easy for the public to question the level of trust in their leaders. I don't believe the trust, the people in this community had in Mayor Mola was ever in question. He was not without his critics, which quite frankly he enjoyed. He believed in the worthy opposition. He



taught me, that in fact, opposition is just that, opposition – not the enemy. Mayor Mola believed that establishing trust included creating relationships. From advocating for important issues like flooding along Fleisher's Brook, to the improvements to our parks and roads, to fighting for sound barriers along Route 80, he was always in touch with the public's needs. He made his mark years ago with the creation of the Public Library and the Recreation Center, which he proudly called one of the best in Bergen County. He sent notes and letters to residents ranging from congratulating them on their graduations and weddings to thanking them for keeping their landscaping in good condition. He delivered Holiday cards of thanks to residents who decorated their homes in December, regardless of the weather.

All of these efforts and many others, all of his advocacy and all of his direct contact with the good people of Elmwood Park developed a trust in a man, trust in a Mayor, which spanned for nearly 5 decades.

The people of Elmwood Park are forever indebted to the contributions and sacrifices made by their leader, Mayor Richard A. Mola.

On a personal level, I feel blessed and privileged to have known and worked under the Mayor for the past 10 years. This past summer, we both had the opportunity to attend our respective National Conventions. The day after the RNC ended, I was in the back yard playing basketball with my son after work and my phone rang. It was the Mayor, just home from Cleveland. I picked up and said, "So how was it?" We chatted a bit about the speeches and events. Then he said listen, go get a pen and



paper. I went inside and I did. He said, "OK write this down, I have some pointers... the food is terrible and expensive in the arena. Make yourself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich at the hotel, put it in a plastic bag and put it in your jacket pocket. He then went on to advise me to leave the arena 20 minutes before the last speech so I wouldn't have to wait an hour for the bus and get back to the room at 2:00 am. He chuckled when he said, "And I don't care that Obama is going to be the last speech of the night, leave 20 minutes early." I laughed too.

But remember the crystal ball? The first night at the arena in Philly, I waited an hour and 15 minutes for a stale pretzel. And yes, I stayed through the Presidents entire speech, waited over an hour for a bus and got to the room just a few minutes before 2 in the morning.

Experience and history matter, lesson learned.

Richard Mola made me a better Clerk, a better Mayor and a better person. He taught me patience, something I'm not very well known for.

Who would have thought that a guy with a funny hat, an umbrella and no cell phone could have such an impact on someone like me? But he did and I am so appreciative of the time we got to work side by side together to make Elmwood Park a better place.

"In the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in your years." ~ Abraham Lincoln.

To my mentor, my friend and my Mayor, God Bless you. I will miss you. Rest in Peace.