

Dr. Mike Mastrangelo: Remarkable Man, Incredible Life!

Elizabeth Canavati



When Mike and Grace Mastrangelo moved to Fort Wayne in 1959, there was a bet going around about how long they would stay. I had been told by several sources that his nationality, east coast upbringing, and the fact that he wasn't an IU School of Medicine graduate were the three main factors behind this bet. Luckily for the medical community and the community

at large, Mike spent the rest of his life serving Fort Wayne and never regretted it.

I reached out to many people in the process of putting this article together. Everyone had a special story to tell. Many said that although Mike was short in stature, his personality was larger than life. Young doctors looked up to him as a great mentor with an impeccable reputation and calm, measured presence. Community non-profits were appreciative of his leadership and financial assistance. His solid Catholic up-bringing made him a great promoter of Catholic education and a giant in his faith.

Faith was the essence behind all that Mike was and did. He was raised by his faith-filled parents, Angelo and Angela Mastrangelo. Mike attended St. Francis Xavier high school and Georgetown University for college and medical school.

"Dr. Mike's love for his wife, children, grandchildren, friends, patients, co-workers, fellow parishioners, and his community was a sincere gift of himself. This is how Mike found meaning and fulfillment in his life and true happiness. Mike understood that faith and love are essential to life in Christ."

Bishop Rhoades,
Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend

Dr. Mike started his surgical residency in 1951. His training was interrupted when he served his country in the US Army Medical Corps, 45th Infantry Division in Korea from 1952-54. Mike didn't find his war time surgery very fulfilling as it was just basic wound repair under sparse medical conditions. He received the Army's Commendation Medal and Combat Medic's badge.

After his time in the service, he finished his general and thoracic residency program and he was a surgery instructor his final year of residency. It was during this time that he married his wife, Grace.

Mike had hoped to go back to New Jersey, near family, and practice but there weren't any opportunities at the time. He was offered positions around the country but thought Fort Wayne was a good option. Mike felt the Midwest would be a good place to start his medical career and accepted a position in September 1959. His lifelong friend, Dr. August "Tommy" Tomusk, joined the same group in October 1959.

Within a couple of years, they decided that it was best for them to start their own group. Upon giving a one-year notice, they were fired immediately. Shocked by the suddenness of their situation, they went to the bank to get a loan. They found a tiny office (only 3 people could be in there at a time) in the Medical Center building on Ewing and Berry. Mike tells the story of how he and Tommy were laying tile in their "new" office on a Saturday, when another physician in the building came down the hall and inquired about getting an estimate from them to do his office.

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Michael J. Mastrangelo, M.D.
August Tomusk, M.D.

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**GENERAL THORACIC & CARDIO VASCULAR
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Dr. August Tomusk Dr. Michael J. Mastrangelo

Mike and Tommy quickly established their own general, vascular, and thoracic practice. Dolores Tomusk was their first nurse. Mike recalls seeing a farmer, who he had operated on, in a follow up visit. The farmer told him that he was having a hard time settling his bill. He gave Mike an ice cold, 2# coffee can with dressed, frozen filleted blue gill. Food for payment was not that unusual in the 50's and 60's.

The Sisters at St. Joseph's referred to Mike and Tommy as members of the "God squad" because they made themselves so available day and night for anybody that needed their help. Mike always felt that he was not alone during surgery.

continued on page 20

He felt there was a greater power watching over him and guiding him. He would ask for help prior to each surgery and he would recite a decade (10 Hail Mary's) of the rosary while scrubbing for surgery.

"We are always pleased when a Northeast Indiana son or daughter after years of study and preparation elsewhere returns home to establish a career-long presence. To be equally appreciated are those many individuals from afar who chose to adopt our community in which to share their talents.

Mike Mastrangelo and his long-time partner August 'Tommy' Tomusk were among the latter. They, like many others before and after them, introduced innovative and advanced practices for whom the rest of us were the fortunate recipients. As an aside, the prompt 24/7 availability of those two 'back-in-the-day' was especially appreciated by hospital emergency room staffs and referring physicians alike. One or the other was always just a phone call away."

Bill Clark, MD

They worked together for more than 30 years at Lutheran, Parkview and St. Joseph's, innovating, and upgrading the medical equipment (such as kidney dialysis machine and ventilator) and techniques in Fort Wayne. According to Dolores Tomusk, Mike and Tommy's relationship worked because they were two vastly different personalities and they had separate talents and strengths. They were so collaborative that it was difficult to separate out who was responsible for what. They worked with a sense of duty and their ultimate goal was always to improve the quality of care in Fort Wayne.



The Tomusk and Mastrangelo families were remarkably close. For the first several years, they rented houses in different neighborhoods but would frequently get together for Sunday dinners. The holidays were important events for the adults and the children. In fact, for 25 years they celebrated Thanksgiving and Christmas together. The Tomusk children considered

Grace and Mike as their aunt and uncle and vice versa.

Another significant friendship was with Dr. Ron Scheeringa. Mike and Ron purchased a 50-acre farm together in Aboite Township in 1972. They eventually built homes on the property and moved to the country. Ron was raised on a farm, so he had a lot of experience with property management. Mike was a city boy but learned to love the country life. They had many adventures on their tractors, while attending to the land they loved.

"Mike was my best friend. He was a person who had many best friends, colleagues, and patients. Mike loved his church and helped many people. He was a great friend and a great neighbor. I will miss him."

Ron Scheeringa, MD

During the 30 years Dr. Mike practiced and after his retirement, he was also actively involved in many medically related organizations:

- Indiana Medical Association as a Delegate for more than 25 years
- President of the FWMS and the Director of the FWMS Foundation for > 10 years.
- Board of Directors for Lutheran Hospital, Lutheran Rehabilitation Hospital, and Parkview Hospital Foundation
- Director of the Duemling Clinic for eight years
- President of Surgical Associates for three years.

"Mike knew medicine but he also knew business. He would help me with lease contracts in the building on Canal St. Everywhere you went, Mike was there. Mike was the force behind Matthew 25. He was one nice guy!"

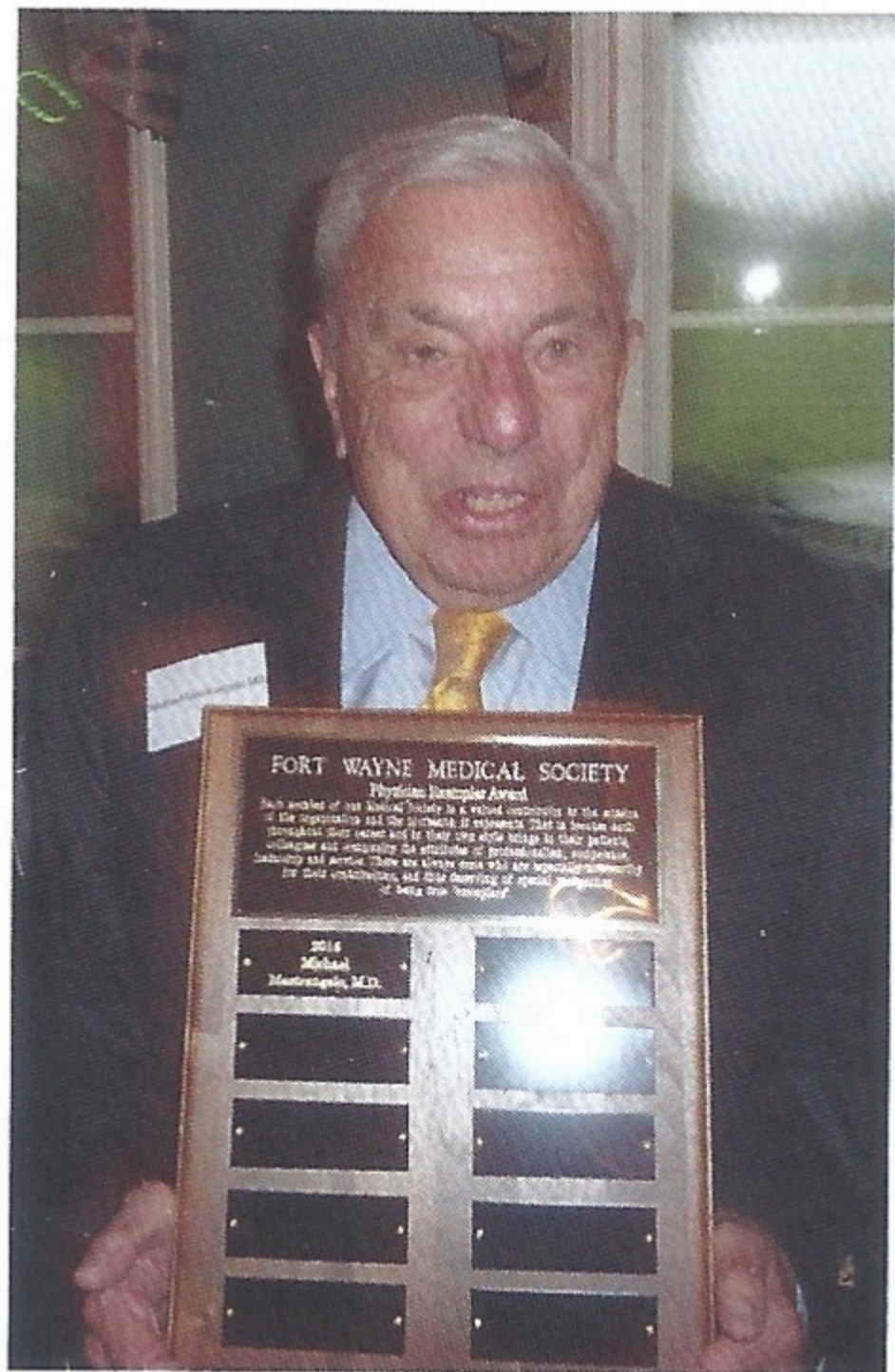
Win Rood

"I first met Mike when I joined Dr Bill Goebel's pediatric allergy practice Fort Wayne Allergy Consultants in 1976. Mike was not only a friend and colleague of my partner, but Dr Goebel was also the pediatrician for Mike and Grace's four children. Mike was always our practice's go-to choice for all surgical referrals.

In 1977 we were invited to join the Duemling Clinic, the specialists-only medical-surgical group founded in 1926 by Dr Arnold Duemling to attend to Lutheran Hospital's specialty needs. Mike was one of the principals of Surgical Associates—the largest group in the clinic—and was very prominent on the clinic board.

Dr Goebel used to enjoy telling an anecdote about Mike that occurred in the late '60's. A hospitalized infant patient of Dr Goebel's was needing abdominal surgery, and Dr Goebel informed the mother that he would be calling in a surgeon. The anxious mother then asked Dr Goebel to please bring in a surgeon "with small hands." Soon after, Mike walked into the room and the mother noted Mike's size and height, she beamed at Dr Goebel, signaling how very well pleased she was!"

Peter Rothman, MD



In 2014, Mike was the first recipient of the Fort Wayne Medical Society Exemplar Award. The Award recognizes individuals who through-

out their career and in their own style brought to the patients, colleagues, and community the attributes of professionalism, competence, leadership, and service. There is a nice video interview on the Fort Wayne Medical Society's YouTube channel that provides great insight into Mike's thoughts, experiences, and beliefs. He was recognized with his name on a plaque that is hung at the medical society office.

After retiring from surgery in 1991, Mike reinvented himself with a second 30-year career—focused on public service in Fort Wayne. There were many organizations that Mike felt particularly committed to:

- **The Allen County Public Library-Friends of the Library and the ACPL Foundation** — 27 years. Mike served as the Director of each organization and President of the Friends of the Library from 1992-95.

"It was very evident to me that Mike had a love of learning, books, and education. He was faithful in attending meetings and contributing to the organizations. He was also adept at managing the investments of the ACPL Foundation. He always had a cheerful, positive attitude and was extremely kind. Mike is most definitely someone who will be missed in both organizations, not to mention the many other organizations of which he was involved."

Michael Horton, JD, Board Member

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of NEI** — Mike served on their Advisory Committee for 28 years. He received the **2013 Don Wolf Award**, which



was established in 1999, and given to an individual in recognition of their commitment and contribution to youth in Fort Wayne.

This is the excerpt from the program when Mike received his award.

Dr. Mastrangelo's journey with Big Brothers Big Sisters has seen

great milestones in 45 years. His guidance, leadership and mentoring have helped Big Brothers Big Sisters grow from serving less than 20 matches to serving almost 2,000 children today. One of his legacies will be forever tied to fundraising, as he plays a prominent role in the Gourmet Dinner Advisory Committee. He has been involved with the event since its inception (1974) and executed a variety of tasks—including everything from carefully hand selecting the meal to ensure perfection and top-quality standards to helping handle critical logistical matters that define the true value of the event to its attendees. Most recent, Dr. Mastrangelo served on our Growth Campaign Steering Committee that had the unique challenge of raising \$6 million to help Big Brother Big Sister become a sustainable organization and serve 5,000 children with a caring adult mentor.

"Dr. Mike is one of a kind. A true gentleman to the core and we will miss him incredibly."

Shelley Schwab, CDO, BBBS of NEI

- **Fort Wayne Museum of Art** — Mike served as a Board Member and on the Finance and Investment Committees for 11 years.

"Dr. Mike Mastrangelo, who was known to most of us simply as Dr. Mike, was a dear friend to me, personally, and a generous friend of the Fort Wayne Museum of Art in terms of both treasure and time. He and his lovely wife, Grace, were regular attendees at virtually every Museum event and exhibition opening night at which they always spent most of their time actually looking closely at the art in each of the galleries.

Dr. Mike's interest in the Museum as an institution blossomed in the year prior to our announcing our American Art Initiative Capital Campaign. Both the Philharmonic and the Museum had just received a grant from the Foellinger Foundation to work on some of our "big picture" dreams with the help of a seasoned mentor. Tom Leedy, the leader of the Dekko Foundation conducted the first series of sessions. Dr. Mike, representing the Philharmonic, ended up sitting alone at their table. Seeing this, we immediately asked him to join the Museum's group, which he did. Our focus for these workshops was to discuss the pros and cons of expanding the Museum and Dr. Mike jumped into this discussion with insight and enthusiasm.

continued on page 22

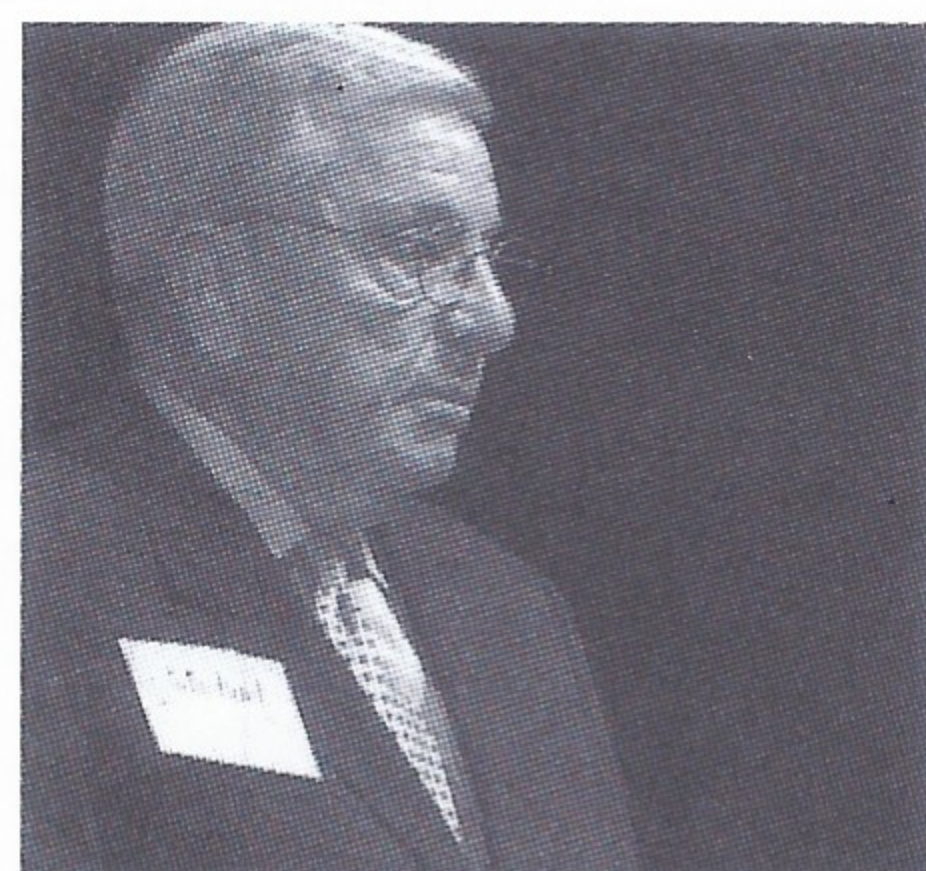
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As the weeks and sessions flew by, we learned that we were ready to launch our expansion campaign and that Dr. Mike had joined our team. Not only did he generously help with the campaign, but he also joined the Museum's Board and started serving on committees, most notably the Investment Committee, where he played a valuable role in shaping our current perspective on our investment practices.

Throughout his years-long service on behalf of the Museum, our personal friendship grew as we shared our experiences and thoughts on art, family, and faith. Dr. Mike's friendship and service meant a great deal to me and to the Museum. He is deeply missed and will be long remembered."

Charles Shepard, CEO, FWMoA

• **Fort Wayne Philharmonic Orchestra** — 28 years. Mike served as



Director twice. The first time for 6 years, then one year off, and another 10 years. He also served as Chairman twice and Acting CEO for 2 years. For the last 20 years, Mike has served on their Advisory Board and the Finance Committee. Mike received the **Helene Foellinger Award** in 2007 during his Acting CEO years.

As a teenager, Mike was a reluctant violinist. (He would have preferred baseball.) His mother made him take lessons for 6 or 7 years and practice an hour daily. It was during this time that he learned to appreciate music. While training in New York, Mike and Grace would get the cheap seats for the New York philharmonic or an opera, whenever possible.

"I first met Mike Mastrangelo when he became involved with the Philharmonic Board. As President of the board, he worked tirelessly to involve everyone and to be sure that everyone was heard.

Dr. Mike stepped up to serve a second time as President of the board at a particularly contentious time in the orchestra's history. It was his calming nature, decency and basic integrity that saw the board through this troubled time.

He worked as hard and diligently as a volunteer as I am sure he did as a surgeon. Mike would spend hours meeting with board members to hear their thoughts and concerns. And he also reached out to patrons that had concerns with the orchestra and he was able to keep many as friends of the orchestra.

When Mike decided that it was time for him to leave the Philharmonic Board, he remained forever on the Finance Committee continuing his work, love, and concern for the orchestra.

It was an honor and a joy to work alongside of Mike and to have him as a friend." Eleanor Marine, FW Philharmonic Board Member

- **Junior Achievement of Northern Indiana** — 30 years. Mike was genuinely committed to this organization. He served as their Director and Secretary and as the JA Foundation Director and Vice-President up until the day he passed. Mike received from JA the **Bronze and Silver Leadership Awards and the Ove Jorgensen Spirit of Leadership Award**. Mike would call us up every year and ask us to support JA. Of course, we did. Who could turn Mike down?



"Through Dr. Mike's many years of service, he was instrumental in moving JANI from an afterschool program serving fewer than 20,000 students

to an organization serving 130,000 students. Dr. Mike's active participation in every campaign and his support helped us as we developed JA BizTown®, JA Finance Park®, and the new facility on Wallen Road. But Dr. Mike's true contribution was felt through his steady and humble leadership. It is said that "humble leaders have more influence, they attract better people, and they earn more confidence, respect, and loyalty than those who rely upon ego and power."

Dr. Mike was a trusted, respected leader with the greatest of humility! When you spoke to Dr. Mike, it was like you were the most important person he had met. He was sincere with his interest and questions. He always shifted his attention from himself back to you. He had a connection to all people. He was genuine and exhibited these attributes whether in a meeting, interacting with strangers, or with his family.

I am sure his faith played a large part in his character and his priorities. The field of medicine, the church, and the numerous non-profits in this community are forever in a better place because Dr. Mike cared. A dedicated family man, Dr. Mike gave all credit to his beautiful wife, Grace. Dr. Mike, a gentleman and dedicated leader, embodied love, service, and faith."

Lena Yarian, President, JANI

- **Matthew 25 Health and Care — 30** years. The Manpower Building (Jefferson and Clay) was purchased around 1985 to be used for indigent medical and dental care. From 1991 until 2002, Mike was the Medical Director and volunteered at Matthew 25. He had served on the Board since 1991. Mike said, “While I was practicing, I would occasionally operate on a Matthew 25 patient. This was always a rewarding experience as the patients were always so thankful. When I retired and had ‘free time’ it was proper to respond ‘yes’ when asked to work at the clinic. It has been one of the better things I have done. It may be a cliché, but ‘giving back’ is especially important.”

“Dr Mike was not only an active board member and volunteer at Matthew 25 for 30 years, but he was truly dedicated and provided tremendous support of the vision of Matthew 25. He continued to steer the organization to best serve patients in not only our community but the surrounding communities. Mike represented the “Fabric of the Community” Award, that he was bestowed, from clinic every day, and from the first days I remember starting at the clinic Dr Mike was seeing patients and giving direction to the staff. Making things work with minimal resources, he would give hope and health to our most needy. His gentle voice would speak volumes and his serving hands touched every aspect of the clinic. We will sorely miss him.”

Tom Gutwein, MD

Mark Dixon, past CEO of Matthew 25, called Dr. Mastrangelo “a pillar of a man” and someone after whom we can all model our lives. Fellow volunteer at the clinic, retired dentist Dr. James Frey, described him as being very instrumental in expanding the clinic’s services to several counties outside Allen County, including into Ohio. “He’s greatly admired and respected there,” he added.

“It’s a privilege to present Dr. Mastrangelo with a Sagamore of the Wabash Award. Dr. Mastrangelo’s professional achievements are matched by his devotion to serving the Fort Wayne community and those less fortunate. Dr. Mastrangelo’s humanity in living, loyalty in friendship, wisdom in council and inspiration in leadership are characteristics that make him worthy of this great honor.”

Liz Brown, IN State Senator



In 2011, Dr. and Mrs. Mastrangelo received the clinic’s “Fabric of the Community Award”, which recognizes exemplary service and honors sacrificial and significant contributions that have been key in helping Matthew 25 fulfill its mission. During an open house showcasing completed renovations at the Matthew 25 medical clinic in early fall 2017, State Sen. Liz Brown presented Dr. Michael Mastrangelo with the prestigious Sagamore of the Wabash Award on behalf of Indiana Gov. Eric J. Holcomb. Dating back to the 1940s, the award is a personal tribute given to those who have rendered a distinguished service to the state and is the highest distinction that the governor of Indiana can bestow.

At the same ceremony that recognized Dr. Mastrangelo’s contributions with the bestowal of the Sagamore of the Wabash award, the blessing of Grace’s Garden took place to honor her impact on the larger community as well. Grace’s Garden, is a memorial to Dr. Mastrangelo’s wife who was a master gardener, and is used as a place of rest and reflection for staff, volunteers and passersby on the site of Matthew 25.



Dr. Mastrangelo credits his late wife with all his accomplishments. “First of all, allow me to mention that Grace was most important in all these endeavors, and anything done was a mutual undertaking,” he stated. “I didn’t do anything alone. I consider finding Grace the biggest achievement in my life.”

continued on page 24

- **St. Joseph Community Health Foundation** — Mike served two full nine-year terms (1995-2006 and 2008-2017) on the Board.



St. Joe Foundation was reorganized as grantmaking, operating Foundation, and ministry of the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ in 1998 after they sold the hospital to assure those vulnerable populations with health and wellness needs would continue to

be served. At that time, Dr. Mike had stepped in as acting Medical Director of Matthew 25. Respect for Dr. Mike and his work led the St. Joe Foundation to make its first two grants to Matthew 25: \$8,642 for a dental x-ray machine and \$100,000 for an Operations Manager and supplies. Since those first grants, Dr. Mike worked hard to assure ongoing strong communication between the two organizations, resulting in over \$4,266,000 in grants to help the poor. He often set up meetings to check in over breakfast or lunch, always providing insight into the challenges of providing quality care to the uninsured, under resourced.

While he was extraordinarily devoted to Matthew 25, his contributions went well beyond. Dr. Mike attended many grant applicant site visits in his twenty years of service. His questions revealed his depth of compassion and understanding of the importance of caring for the vulnerable – and provided a broader view for all participating. His Roman Catholic faith was important to him, and he helped us all maintain a genuine commitment to realizing it through the Foundation's work. He wasn't afraid to challenge a committee's discussion if it drifted into a direction inconsistent with Church teachings.

*In 2000, his fellow Board Members unanimously nominated him for the **Raymond Rosenberger Minette Baum Award** – one of the highest recognitions they can bestow on an individual. This is an award for exceptional service to the "indigent" in our community with a hefty cash award. Dr. Mike humbly accepted it and donated back the proceeds to several charities in the community.*

Dr. Mike was exceptional as a Board Member, Mentor, Philanthropist, and Friend. He is and will be missed. We were truly blessed to work with him for 20 years." Meg Distler, Executive Director

Mike's longest commitment was to his Catholic faith. Mike and Grace were weekly participants at Mass at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church. They were involved in various ministries during the Mass. They were co-chairs for the building fund committee twice, and he was a member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Mike was a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and a Knight of Malta (chivalric orders recognized by the Holy See.) He was also a member of Legatus.



Dr. Mastrangelo and his late wife, Grace, were passionately committed to helping support Catholic education. He served on the original school board of directors for Bishop Dwenger High School and continued his service for decades. Beginning in 1993, he and Grace offered a full-tuition merit-based scholarship for a student whose family had a demonstrated financial need. Their generosity has funded a Bishop Dwenger education for more than 25 students. "It's very rewarding to see youngsters develop," said Dr. Mastrangelo.

"Dr. Mastrangelo continued to follow the progress of all the recipients and was always interested in where they attended college and what career paths they followed," said Katie Burns, director of development and alumni relations at the school. "His commitment to our community, our church, Bishop Dwenger High School and our students is just incredible."

Dr. Mastrangelo and Grace were significant donors to Bishop Dwenger, and they first chaired the inaugural Saints Alive fundraiser. In 2004 they were inducted in the Bishop Dwenger High School Hall of Fame and received the "**Citizens of Two Worlds Award**" honoring their outstanding contributions to the community.



I knew Dr Mike and Grace for nearly forty years, first as the Chaplain at Bishop Dwenger High School and from 2000 to 2016 as their pastor at St Elizabeth Ann Seton Church. They were one of the most generous parishioners...not just financially but also sharing their time and talent.

Dr Mike would never hesitate to share a piece of advice, always helpful, just a "suggestion for you to consider". He was a man full of faith. He spoke it, he did it...his faith expressed and put into action. He deeply loved God and lived out of that love in dealing with others. He never forgot his roots nor the blessings he had received. He returned God's blessings on him in his generosity to help others and the community. He touched so many in diverse ways. His gentleness and compassion, his generosity and faith will be long remembered in so many parts of our community. We were truly enriched by his presence in our midst. God blessed him in this life and blessed us with him. One of the finest men I have ever known." Fr Jim Shafer

- **University of St. Francis** — In 2008, Sister M Elise Kriss invited Mike to serve on the University of St. Francis Board of Trustees. He spent time on the Development and Mission Integration Committees. During Dr. Mastrangelo's service on the board, USF continued to expand, purchasing the historic Scottish Rite Center and Chamber of Commerce building and opening the Business Center and the USF Robert Goldstine Performing Arts Center, home to the USF Music Technology Department. USF also completed renovations to Brookside mansion and the opening of a facility in Crown Point, Indiana.

Upon being granted Emeritus Trusteeship in 2017, Dr. Mastrangelo received a commemorative plaque with a board resolution and commendation of his service. In 2020, Mike received an Honorary Doctor of Letters Degree.

Mike also received the **Msgr. J. William Lester Award Supporting Catholic Education** from the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend in 2013.

Editors' Note: I would like to acknowledge all the wonderful people I spoke and corresponded with as I wrote this article. Some of the information was obtained from an article in *Today's Catholic*, 11/10/2017



FAREWELL, DEAR FRIENDS