

# Joseph J. & Barbara A. O'Connor Memorial Scholarship



We believe that the most fitting way to honor the memory of our parents, Joseph and Barbara (Hickson) O'Connor is by establishing this scholarship that helps further the education of so many students. Both devoted their lives to educating the youth of Westfield and believed that all students should be afforded the chance to attend college. Respected educators



and positive role models, they dedicated their lives to the service of others and profoundly impacted the lives of so many Westfield citizens. In addition to public education, they shared their faith with countless students through the CCD program at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament Church where they were active members until their deaths.

Joseph O'Connor, one of fifteen children born to Ulysses and Irene (Gosselin) O'Connor was raised and educated in the Whip City. He graduated from St. Mary's High School and received his bachelor's and master's degrees from Westfield State College after serving in the United States Navy during World War II. He furthered his education at the University of Massachusetts and received his CAGS in 1971.

After his sudden death in 1981, our father's work was recognized in a proclamation by the Westfield City Council. The City Council noted, "Joseph O'Connor was a credit to this city, the Commonwealth, and thereby to his country. His span of life was short, but the quality of his life was exemplary. Further, let it be known that this Council is fully cognizant of his outstanding contribution to this city's most precious asset, its youth."

Though he began his career as a history teacher at the former Intermediate School in the 1950's, our father is best remembered as the principal of the former Prospect Hill Elementary School and served there for 21 years until his passing. A first-grade teacher at the school, Emilia Bujnowski, recalled, "It was always the children first. 'Let's do what is best for the kids,' he would say." He helped to initiate the creation of libraries in the Westfield elementary schools, and in 2003, the North Middle School library was posthumously named the Joseph J. O'Connor Library in honor of his important work in education. In addition, he tirelessly served his community and the youth of Westfield through his work as Director of the Title I Program, as the first president of the Child Guidance Clinic, as a member of the first city-wide drug task force, and as an instructor in first aid and CPR for the local American Red Cross.

Barbara O'Connor, the first of five children born to John and Anna (Sullivan) Hickson, was raised and educated in Springfield, MA. She graduated from Sacred Heart High School in Springfield in 1945 and matriculated to Westfield Teacher's College where she took an active role in organizing events for her classmates. She graduated in 1949 with a bachelor's degree in education where she was voted by her classmates as "Most Likely to Succeed." She had a profound passion for the teaching profession and enjoyed a long and distinguished career with the Westfield Public Schools. Our mother was often identified by her colleagues as a Master Teacher for her devoted attention to the social and emotional welfare of all students in addition to their academic successes. She spent countless hours running Memorial Day Programs in various elementary schools and at South Middle School where she served as the longtime director of the Drama Club.

After retiring from teaching in 1991, she immediately began spending precious time with her greatest loves- her grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She treated each as special and unique and made time for all of them. Above all else, our mom never wavered on her devotion, support, and great love for her family and friends, a love she carried in her heart until her passing in April, 2021.

Our parents met while attending Westfield State College and married in 1951. Together, they raised four children: Dennis, a retired Springfield police sergeant, Tricia, a retired Westfield teacher, Kevin, a Senior Vice President at Westfield Bank, and Kathleen, a retired Victim/Witness Advocate for the Hampden District Attorney. Our parents always encouraged us to value education and to involve ourselves in community service.

Both our parents were honored with an array of state and local proclamations. After his passing the Westfield City Council noted, "Joseph O'Connor was a credit to this city, the Commonwealth, and thereby to his country. His span of life was short, but the quality of his life was exemplary. Further, let it be known that this Council is fully cognizant of his outstanding contribution to this city's most precious asset, its youth." State Senator, John Velis, recalled, "Barbara was a selfless educator, always putting the needs of her students in front of herself, leaving a lasting and profound impact on countless others."

The loss of our parents leaves a deep void in our lives that is filled only by the depth of the legacy they left to our family and the city of Westfield. This legacy was evident in the hundreds of family members, friends, colleagues, and local dignitaries who waited in long lines to pay their respects at each of their funerals. Today, through CSF Westfield Dollars for Scholars, we honor their memory and hope to continue their long legacy by contributing to the education of Westfield's students.

Written by: Tricia (O'Connor) LeClair, daughter  
Kathleen (O'Connor) Sitler, daughter  
October 1, 2021