

# Vincentian Spotlight

## Remembering Jack Eschmann

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There are numerous adjectives to describe Jack Eschmann. Try counting the grains of sand at Jones Beach and you'll understand what we mean. To the Society he was one of the greatest examples of Vincentian service. He served as we all desire to serve, with fervent commitment, love, and no regrets. To know Jack all you need do is consider his fruits. He leaves behind a vast legacy of eight children, twenty-seven grandchildren, and eight great-grandchildren, along with the many programs he initiated on Long Island and abroad to help the poorest among us. Amid his many attributes, he was a Vincentian for the Society of St. Vincent de Paul, an 'Extraordinary Minister' at St. Barnabas Church in Bellmore, Vice President of the Life Center and the architect of several community based programs including Anthony House and Dismas House. He orchestrated annual aid to the Dominican Republic, where he journeyed often to help the poor build a better community. To date, the water purification system he helped construct, which is still in use today, has been replicated in other poor areas of the country, and has been recognized as one of the best models of systemic change.

As a teenager, Jack earned a pilot's license and joined the USAF as an airplane mechanic. To sharpen his new found skills, he bought an old Army BT-13 trainer plane and one day while attempting to takeoff in the snow, he clipped a tree and crashed. That fateful night, after surviving an accident that kept him in a full body cast for months, Jack promised God that "if He got him out of this, he would join His army, doing whatever He lead him to do." With great conviction and purpose, that's exactly what he did. It's well known that Jack refused any praise for the life he led. Whether this resulted from his pact with God or his meekness of heart, we'll never know, but it's a wondrous reflection of his character nevertheless.

To be extraordinary, you must first be ordinary. From the outside peering in, Jack was quite the normal guy. He was a police officer who loved his wife, children and friends, frequented mass, and assumed a fairly modest life. But the blessings of the Lord are many for the cheerful giver. And the blessings of his family were plentiful. His son recounts, "Though we weren't rich, at a young age we saw so many boys who didn't have life



easy and we felt lucky to be in a “wealthy” family.” All of his children remember a loving, God fearing father, who enjoyed spending time with his family.

Jack would bring home homeless people to enjoy dinner with his family and much to the chagrin of his wife Winifred; he would occasionally allow them to spend the night. Winnie rarely complained. She grew accustomed to midnight phone calls from drug addicts in need of someone to physically help them resist the urge and get through the night. Out the door Jack would go to answer their call. He was happy to sacrifice his time, talents, and treasure to those who needed them most and he was relentless in committing the resources of others as well. He had an uncanny way of getting his friends and acquaintances involved in his causes, which eventually became their causes.

Jack operated with as much integrity and generosity in his profession as he did in his personal life. As a police officer for 40 years with the Nassau County Police Department, he was cited 17 times for excellent and exceptional police work. One such time, he didn’t hesitate to jump in a freezing lake to search under water for a drowning boy. Stories like these illustrate why he was acknowledged as one of the most decorated cops in the history of the NCPD. He had a brief stint with the NCPD Air Bureau, but quickly left the lofty detachment of the skies and returned to the streets, where he could interact with people directly. Still, during his brief time with the NCPD Air Bureau, Jack was cited for a daring sea rescue of two boys who were adrift in the ocean. He loved working the streets of Roosevelt because it was “where the people were,” he



said. He was known to mentor those he arrested, showing mercy to those that needed it, and justice to those that deserved it.

Jack lived a life of faith, love and humility. He truly defines the Vincentian spirit. Although he will be sorely missed, we celebrate his life today and we rejoice in his homecoming.