

Caroline school board candidate dies unexpectedly while vacationing

By **ABBY ANDREWS** Staff Writer | Posted: Friday, October 19, 2012 3:06 pm

DENTON -- Former Caroline County Commissioner Marty Gangemi died unexpectedly Tuesday after a suspected heart attack while vacationing in Bermuda with his wife and friends.

Gangemi, who currently was running for one of the first elected seats on the Caroline County Board of Education, was a Caroline County native with a long history of service to the county.

Gangemi's name will still appear on the ballot in this year's election, said Sandi Logan, director of the Caroline County Board of Elections.

"It's too late to remove it," Logan said. "Absentee ballots are already coming in. Sample ballots have been mailed to voters."

In the event Gangemi is elected in the first education district, where he is running against Louise Cheek, the bill that created the hybrid Board of Education says Gangemi's replacement will be chosen by the remaining voting members of the board, after they interview all applicants during an open meeting with at least two weeks' notice.

He was remembered Friday for his dedication to both his community and his family, as well as the way he treated everyone, with respect, compassion and an endless supply of hugs.

"I feel like I've lost a brother," said Roger Layton, who served with Gangemi on the county commission from 2002 to 2006. "The community has lost a good man, and much too soon."

"He was the nicest guy I ever had the opportunity to work with in any capacity," said Jack Cole, who also served on the county commission with Gangemi. "I felt wounded (when I heard of his passing.)"

The news of Gangemi's sudden passing hit hard Friday in Caroline County, where the county government ordered flags flown at half staff, but Mario "J" Gangemi, one of Marty Gangemi's two sons, said the family wants everyone to celebrate his father's life, instead of mourning the loss.

"It was a good life," J Gangemi said. "He touched so many people."

Marty Gangemi was such a considerate person in life, his son said, the viewing is from 7 to 9 p.m. Oct. 26 at Fleegle and Helfenbein Funeral Home in Greensboro, and the funeral at 2 p.m. Oct. 27 at the North Carolina High School auditorium, so as not to interfere with daily work schedules.

"My dad wouldn't want us to be inconvenient to everybody," J Gangemi said.

A memorial fund will be established in Marty Gangemi's name, J Gangemi said, to raise money for assistive technologies for kids with special needs, and to fund a scholarship for North Carolina High School students.

A golf tournament in Marty Gangemi's memory is also in the works, his son said, which will raise money specifically to reinvigorate youth golf in Caroline County, in addition to raising money for the memorial fund.

The Marty Gangemi Red Socks Golf Classic will ask all its participants to wear red socks, J Gangemi said, as his dad was known to this day for wearing red socks every day in high school.

"That was his trademark," J Gangemi said.

Marty Gangemi was born in Greensboro, and still lived there with his wife, Alice. The couple graduated from North Carolina High School together in 1965, married in 1966 and welcomed J in 1967. They later had a second son, Tony.

"They were soulmates," J Gangemi said of his parents.

While his sons were in school, Marty Gangemi coached youth sports and was involved in the PTA at their schools. J Gangemi said he thought so highly of his father, he asked him to be the best man in his wedding.

Marty Gangemi was just as doting as a grandparent as he had been as a parent, attending the sports and arts performances of his four grandchildren, Kyle, Sophie, Kyra and Tommy.

Just recently, Marty Gangemi had watched Kyle, a freshman on Loyola University Maryland's lacrosse team, play at a team camp in North Carolina, and had attended one of Kyra's field hockey games at Padua Academy.

J Gangemi said he wanted to publicly thank the friends who were on vacation in Bermuda with his parents, J.D. and Arleen Neal and Mike and Cay Cutright, all of Denton.

"They have been so very, very helpful, when my mom needed some good folks," J Gangemi said.

When he was not with his family, Gangemi was working or volunteering in the community.

Gangemi retired as regional manager from Choptank Electric Cooperative after 35 years. He was active in the United Way of Caroline County, serving as president and, as of May 2008, as its first executive director.

"He was a good man, with a heart of gold," said Parke Hahn, president of the Board of Directors of the United Way of Caroline County. "He was an integral part of raising funds, and we are certainly going to miss him."

On June 18, 2002, he was appointed by Gov. Parris Glendening as interim county commissioner, after John "Jack" LeGates passed away while in office in May 2002.

Gangemi successfully ran for a four-year elected term in November 2002, serving until Dec. 5, 2006.

Cole was president of the commission when Gangemi was appointed in 2002, and made known then his approval of the choice in a letter to the [i]Times-Record[/i]. A decade later, Cole stood by that opinion.

"He was a great choice," Cole said. "He served the people well, simply because he cared."

Cole said Gangemi never had a hidden agenda or ulterior motives when he made decisions.

"There was nothing mean-spirited about him, and he couldn't understand people who were," Cole said.

Cole remembered a commissioners meeting during which Gangemi told Bill Morrison, then the president of the Caroline County Taxpayers Association, "Mr. Morrison, I love you like a brother, but I'm going to disagree with you on that point."

"I don't remember the point, but I remember the statement, because that's how he approached everyone," Cole said.

Cole, who also is running for a seat on the Board of Education in the upcoming election, said he was tempted to avoid a candidates' forum scheduled for Monday evening in the wake of his friend's passing, but he accepted an invitation to say a few words about Gangemi at the event.

"My first inclination was to not do it, but that's not the proper thing," Cole said.

Layton also remembered Gangemi telling people, "I love you like a brother," as well as readily hugging anyone.

"He was just a very compassionate man," Layton said.

Layton said his friendship with Gangemi began long before the two served on the commission, when Gangemi recruited Layton to coach a youth football team.

"I took a liking to him right off the bat," Layton said. "I can't imagine anyone meeting him and not coming away with the same impression."

When both were elected in November 2002, Layton said he learned a lot from Gangemi, even though Gangemi had only been on the board as an interim commissioner for a few months at that time. Layton said Gangemi always asked direct questions during meetings.

“I could always depend on him to get as much out of a meeting as possible, so we could make the right decisions,” Layton said.

Layton said Gangemi bore the brunt of a lot of jokes about his short stature, but there was nothing short about him.

“He was high on integrity, high on compassion,” Layton said. “He was a big man in character.”

Layton remembered Gangemi constantly talking about his family and how much he enjoyed spending time with them.

“My compassion goes out to them,” Layton said. “He loved them all so much.”