

A tribute to a beloved publisher

By Tracey Rauh | Editor 21 hrs ago



John Celestino, former publisher, North of Boston Media Group
North of Boston Media Group



John Celestino was a champion to his people. He was our cheerleader, a great boss.

He lifted us up.

So of course, when we learned about John's sudden passing last weekend, we were shocked and saddened.

Today, though, a week later, I want to set that sadness aside and celebrate the essence of a man who was determined, smart, giving — and yes — impatient and goofy sometimes.

We liked that. He made work fun.

“As a regional publisher of newspapers in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and New York, John spent more than 100 nights a year in hotels,” said newly appointed North of Boston Media Group Publisher Jim Falzone.

“One day I noticed he had an unusually large screwdriver in his laptop bag and asked him why he was carrying it. He explained that during the pandemic, a lot of hotels were short staffed, and the batteries would die on the door locks. To let him into his room, the receptionist would retrieve a large screwdriver and open his door,” Jim continued. “This happened so many times that

John bought his own giant screwdriver. I still smile thinking of an executive publisher prying open a hotel door. He was fiercely independent.”

Director of Audience Development Steve Milone recalls John’s thoughtfulness and efforts to be approachable — just another guy.

“When he first arrived at The Eagle-Tribune, he came down to my department and went around to each employee introducing himself and asking their names and positions. He then proceeded to come down every single day for a couple of weeks more, stopping by each person’s desk and saying hello to each by name until he got everyone’s right,” Steve said.

“He just wanted to get to know everyone and let them know that his door would always be open.”

Vice President of Advertising Mark Zappala says he was inspired by John’s humility.

“When he said he had an idea, he would always listen to my feedback. Many times we’d just go forward with his thoughts, but also many times he’d listen to my concerns and say, ‘that’s a good point’ or, ‘I hadn’t thought of that, you’re right. Let’s not do it,’” Mark recalled.

“He had no ego and he was relentlessly supportive of our team.”

Office Manager Linda Gardner emphasized John’s generosity, saying that whenever we had any type of drive to help our veterans or the Lazarus House, John bought cartons of items. She also has special recollections of the first Christmas season he was here.

“I know he was surprised and happy when I decorated his office and put up a tree for him. I also got him a huge container of nuts, because he started his day every day with a handful,” Linda recalled. “I don’t know if anyone ever decorated his office for him. I’m glad I did that.”

For my part, I treasure a ritual that paints a picture of his playfulness.

John came back to my office at least a few times a day most days; he was a high-contact publisher in a good way. Every time he got up to leave he’d put his hand on the light switch by the door.

“I’m not going to do it,” he’d say.

I answered, “Yes you are.”

We’d have a short stare-down. He’d pause, smile, and of course, turn off the light. Then he’d scurry off like a streak of lightning, bringing his energy with him, too.

Some have asked why we reported the cause of his death the way we did. The answer is he was a public figure, and it happened in a public place. Both matters made it necessary to write the story as such, as we have for others who have died in a similar way. As a newspaperman, he would have understood.

Anyone fortunate enough to have known John has fond memories of who he was and the time spent with him.

So, it seems right to close this column with a particularly applicable quote from the author Mark Twain:

“Let us endeavor so to live, that when we come to die, even the undertaker will be sorry.”

The undertaker's sorry, John, and we are too. We'll miss you so.