

Gerard J. “Jess” Fitzpatrick 1928-2006

Gerard J. “Jess” Fitzpatrick was born on January 28, 1928 in Salamanca, New York. He was a lifelong resident of Ellicottville. A businessman and County Legislator, Mr. Fitzpatrick was committed to improving the economy and quality of life of the residents of Cattaraugus County. His deep-rooted values were the basis for his dedication to family, God, country, and Notre Dame.

Jess Fitzpatrick was a graduate of Ellicottville High School and a 1949 graduate of the University of Notre Dame with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics. While at Notre Dame, he played Inter-Hall Football. He was the center on the team that won the Inter-Hall Championship held in Notre Dame Stadium in October 1948.

Mr. Fitzpatrick was a business leader in Ellicottville, serving as President and Chief Executive Officer of the wood products firm begun by his family in 1895. He began working for the company during World War II and returned after he earned his economics degree in 1949 to manage the family’s plant. The company became Fitzpatrick & Weller, Inc. in 1965, a diversified wood products manufacturing company. He was a key promoter of the company’s expansion into international trade with Japan.

Jess Fitzpatrick devoted his life to Cattaraugus County politics. He became a County Legislator in 1984, and was nominated majority whip. From 1988 to 1991 and 1994 to 1995, he served as assistant majority leader. In 1996 he was elected majority leader and served through June 24, 1997. On June 25, 1997, he became Chairman of the Legislature and retained that position until his death. As Chairman, Mr. Fitzpatrick served as an ex-officio member of all County Committees. He also served as legislative representative to the Extension Service and Tourist Bureau. He also served as a director of the New York State Association of Counties.

Mr. Fitzpatrick actively served on the Southern Tier West Regional Planning and Development Board and as Chairman of the Southern Tier Extension Railroad Authority. As Chairman of the Railroad Authority, he presided over final negotiations with Norfolk Southern to enter into a transaction resulting in the saving of the Southern Tier Extension Railroad line. He presided over several large rehabilitation projects, and saw the line become profitable as a private commercial venture.

Jess Fitzpatrick was especially proud of his support of the Jamestown Community College expansion, and was an advocate for the creation of a downtown Olean Cattaraugus County Campus of Jamestown Community College.

For almost 30 years, he led efforts toward the upgrading of U.S. Route 219 to a four-lane expressway between Springville and Salamanca. He was Co-Chairman of the Cattaraugus County Route 219 Development Committee since its creation in 1994. He also advocated for projects along the Route 219 corridor that would bring projected economic benefits to the region.

He was a lifelong member of Holy Name of Mary Roman Catholic Church in Ellicottville, where he served as a Eucharistic minister. He was head of the Cattaraugus County Republican Committee, a member of the Knights of Columbus, a former member of the Ellicottville Volunteer Fire Department, and a former member and past president of the Salamanca Kiwanis Club.

Jess Fitzpatrick died on April 27, 2006. His efforts to improve the economy of the county and region, through job creation and infrastructure improvements, will leave a long-term positive legacy. He will always be remembered as an “eternal optimist” who loved life.