

Sidney Epstein

Sidney Epstein died peacefully on December 9, 2013 in Scarborough, Maine. He had celebrated his 100th birthday with his family last July 28th.

Sid was a native and lifelong resident of Bangor, until his recent “retirement” at age 99 to Scarborough. He described himself as “third generation” Bangor stock, as his parents, Edwin Epstein and Ette (Hutner) Epstein, and his grandparents, all emigrated from Russia to the area around the turn of the last century.

Sid was born on July 28, 1913, at home on Essex Street in Bangor and grew up on East Summer Street. He attended the Abraham Lincoln School and graduated from Bangor High School in 1931, where he played on the basketball team, one year vying for the state championship, and finishing as runner-up. He retained close friends from that class for most of his life, serving as class treasurer and enjoying the reunions until they ceased for want of enough other alumnae still able to attend with him.

Sid graduated from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania in 1935. He was a member of Sigma Alpha Mu and made many fast friends both within and without the fraternity. He returned to Bangor by sleeper train for summers and vacations, working summers at the Northeast Harbor movie theater, part of the Graphic Theater Circuit started by his late father in the era of silent movies and vaudeville. The “circuit” of theaters at one time included many towns in Maine, from Bangor and Old Town to Van Buren, Dexter, Dover, Lincoln and Northeast Harbor.

After college Sid returned to the area, managing the theaters in Dover-Foxcroft and Dexter, spending weekends in Bangor. He and his college roommate embarked on a cross country trip in 1937, driving a '36 Chevrolet coast to coast and back, with a block of ice in the rear seat for cooling through the dessert. They had entrée to movie studios in Hollywood and watched Humphrey Bogart and Ozzie Nelson filming, and drove all night to get to the Braddock-Louis championship fight in Chicago. In 1942, he enlisted in the Marines and served throughout the war in Philadelphia, in charge of materials distribution, and was discharged as a Captain. It was there that he met and was smitten with Helen Brill, and after a wartime romance, they married in February of 1946 in Philadelphia.

In 1946, Sid once again returned to Bangor, where he and Helen eventually settled

on Webster Avenue, which became their home for fifty years and where they reared their 3 children, Elaine, Bruce and Carol. In the 1950s, with the advent of television, Sid thought it best to plan for a day when no one would attend the movies, and he focused on expanding into commercial real estate development. This eventually became the chief focus of his work, but he remained intimately involved with the movie theater business for decades. For many years, his office was on the second floor of the Bangor Opera House, where the sounds of the matinee and the smell of popcorn filled his office. Generations of movie-goers in Bangor, Brewer and Old Town got to know him as he sold tickets, served patrons at the concession, directed traffic at the Bangor Drive-In or tried to enforce good conduct at the children's matinees. assuring miscreants that he knew their parents.

Over the decades, Sid's real estate endeavors expanded from post offices and government office buildings in small towns to developing and redeveloping many of the properties that became part of the local fabric of life. These included Doug's Shop and Save at Third and Union (the first retail store in the Hannaford chain), Key Plaza, and 6 State Street in Bangor as well as Brewer Shopping Center, Old Town Plaza, Orono's Dryden Terrace, Dunkin Donuts, bank branches and many mall area national retailers. . Sid had a passionate interest in his tenants, large and small, and particularly admired the small local businesses that he believed were such an important part of the backbone of the business community. His involvement extended to his encouragement and support of many local contractors, start-up businesses and community services.

Sid was a fixture in the Bangor business community for decades, part of a generation where deals were made in person, unwritten promises were honored years after the fact, and business relationships were often deeply personal as well. He walked Main and State Streets daily, chatting at length with many on his trips to the post office, bank, and local eateries. He constantly drove the rounds of his properties, dropping in on tenants to take the pulse of their business, oversee construction sites and personally inspect maintenance.

A firm believer in the importance of exercise, Sid was a pace-setter for his jogging group at the YMCA. He enjoyed playing golf at the Bangor "Muni" and was a long-time member of the Penobscot Valley Country Club, where he was a regular for lunch even after he reluctantly gave up golf at 98. While he had to abandon swimming at 99, he was still riding his stationary bike and exercising in the gym at 100, even when he needed assistance to move from his wheelchair to the equipment in his last months.

Sid was a director of the old Northeast Bank (formerly Eastern Trust) for a decade, President of the Jewish Community Center and a life-long member of Congregation Beth Israel, where he and Helen donated the "Helen and Sidney Epstein Room" in 1991. For this charitable and other contributions, Sid and Helen were presented with a Key to Bangor at the dedication. He served on the Bangor Water District board for decades, and was a Mason and member of the Kiwanis Club of Dover Foxcroft for over 75 years. He remained active in the community and his business, regularly inspecting the local real estate scene and his properties as recently as mid-November when he came to Bangor for a party at the Bangor Mall Cinemas. The theater business started by his father is now over 95 years old and Epstein Properties is managed by his daughter, Carol Epstein.

Their family and wide circle of friends were always the center of their lives for Sid and Helen. The network constantly expanded with their world-wide travels and winters spent in Boca Raton, Florida. After his beloved Helen's death in 2000, Sid, spent winters at the President Country Club in West Palm Beach, where he had many close friends.

Sid is predeceased by his wife of 54 years, Helen (Brill) Epstein and his sister, Marjorie Epstein. He is survived by his children, Carol Epstein of Bangor, Bruce Epstein and daughter-in-law Becky Epstein, of Wellesley, Massachusetts, and Elaine Epstein and son-in-law, James Krachey, of Sharon, Massachusetts. He was most proud of his seven grandchildren, Jesse and Joshua Semba of Bangor, Lindsey, Kassie and Rusty Epstein of Wellesley, Massachusetts, and Ross and Anna Krachey of Sharon, Massachusetts. He is also survived by his sister-in-law Michele Brill of Cherry Hill, New Jersey, nephew David Brill of Cherry Hill, niece Elissa Brill Pashkin of Florence, Massachusetts, and their families.

Funeral services will be held at 11:00 am on Thursday, December 12, 2013 at the Epstein Room at Beth Israel Synagogue, 144 York Street, Bangor, with Rabbi Lerner officiating. Interment will be at the Beth Israel Cemetery, Mt. Hope Avenue, Bangor. Memorial week will be observed with visiting hours Thursday, Dec 12, from 5:30 – 8:00 pm and Friday, Dec 13, from 5:00 – 7:30 pm at the home of Carol Epstein at 43 Vance Avenue in Bangor. Those wishing to remember Sidney may make donations to either Beth Israel Synagogue – Epstein Fund, 144 York Street, Bangor, 04401 or to the Bangor Area Homeless Shelter at 263 Main St, Bangor, 04401. A service of Brookings-Smith, 133 Center Street, Bangor.