



## Robert Francis Flacke

January 25, 1933 - November 10, 2018

LAKE GEORGE, N.Y. -- Robert F. Flacke, who led both the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the Adirondack Park Agency and transformed the Fort William Henry Resort into one of Upstate New York's leading tourism businesses, died Saturday, November 10, 2018, at his longtime home in Lake George. He was 85 and had been in declining health.

Mr. Flacke was a U.S. Navy veteran, educator, environmentalist and former New York State and local government official. After a storied football career at the College of the Holy Cross, he was drafted to play professional football by the Detroit Lions of the NFL but instead became a submarine warfare expert on a Naval Destroyer Escort. After active service, he served in the Naval Reserve for 30 years, attaining the rank of Captain.

Mr. Flacke was the only person in the history of New York State to serve as both the New York State Commissioner of Environmental Conservation and the Chairman of the Adirondack Park Agency. As DEC Commissioner, he pressed for the establishment of the New York State Olympic Regional Development Authority (ORDA), the state agency that oversees the Lake Placid 1980 Winter Olympic facilities and New York State's three publicly owned ski centers. He served briefly as interim chief executive officer of ORDA and was serving on the ORDA Board of Directors at the time of his death.

After his college years and Naval service, Mr. Flacke became a teacher and guidance counselor in the Queensbury School District where, in the 1960s, he implemented one of the first learning-disability programs in the state. He also created the basketball and football teams, acquiring the school's first uniforms from his Holy Cross friend and teammate, Robert Dee, who played professional football with the Washington Redskins of the NFL and the Boston Patriots of the AFL.

In addition to his school responsibilities, Mr. Flacke became involved in a Lake George business in which the family of his wife, the former Jean McEnaney of Albany, had an interest. At the time, the Fort William Henry Corp. owned a small hotel and a half-finished

reconstructed historical fort on the site of a major 1757 French and Indian War battle. Mr. Flacke was named President of Fort William Henry Corp. when his father-in-law, Edwin McEnaney, died suddenly on December 1, 1958. Over a 60-year period, Mr. Flacke led a major expansion of Fort William Henry's hotel, conference, retail and restaurant businesses. The Fort William Henry Hotel is the oldest resort at Lake George and a preeminent Upstate New York tourism destination.

A Democrat in heavily Republican upstate New York, Mr. Flacke was appointed to the Lake George Town Planning Board and later elected to two, four-year terms as Supervisor of the Town of Lake George (1970-1979). He also represented the town on the Warren County Board of Supervisors and served as the county's finance and budget officer.

New York Gov. Malcolm Wilson, a Republican, appointed Mr. Flacke to the Adirondack Park Agency in 1974 at a time when the newly created agency's land-use policies had generated deep resentment among property owners and local officials across the Adirondacks. Mr. Flacke served until 1983 and was credited with improving the APA's relationship with local people. Gov. Wilson's successor, New York Gov. Hugh Carey, a Democrat, appointed Mr. Flacke chairman of the APA in 1975 and, as a result of his success in the Adirondacks, as Department of Environmental Conservation Commissioner in 1979.

As DEC Commissioner, Mr. Flacke signed the necessary regulatory permits that allowed construction of the 1980 Winter Olympic facilities at Lake Placid, N.Y., and then, in the weeks just prior to the Games, when chaotic management failures threatened to disrupt the events, Mr. Flacke was asked by Gov. Carey to take charge. He was widely credited with saving Lake Placid and the Olympics from international humiliation.

The Olympics opened in heavy snow, and thousands of international visitors were stranded in sub-zero cold in the remote Adirondack Mountains village with too few buses. Gov. Carey declared a state of emergency. As the world watched, Mr. Flacke and then-New York State Transportation Commissioner William Hennessy, now deceased, worked urgently to resolve the dangerous transportation failures. They succeeded.

"The Washington Post reported in its Sunday edition on February 17 (1980), 'The most confusing question during the first week of the Winter Olympics has not been the task of deciding whether these Games are a lovely, snowy, slow-paced winter carnival or the most incredibly botched boondoggle and rip-off imaginable ... DEC Commissioner Robert Flacke took command of the state response. Working with (bus company) executives, state transportation staff and (Lake Placid Olympic Organizing Committee) staff, a

management plan had been developed within six to seven hours to parcel out responsibilities ... The plan finally began to work and the situation dramatically improved. Flacke said the real heroes were the state employees working with him and the (Lake Placid Olympic Organizing Committee) who ... pulled the games from the brink of chaos,” wrote author Michael Burgess in “A Long Shot to Glory: How Lake Placid Saved the Winter Olympics and Restored the Nation’s Pride.”

At DEC, Mr. Flacke focused on creating permit approval systems to administer the expanding suite of environmental laws enacted in the 1970s. He created DEC’s criminal investigation division, pressed local governments to install or upgrade municipal sewage treatment plants, and acquired lands to facilitate a broad expansion of hiking trails, campgrounds and snowmobile trails in the Adirondacks and Catskills. He earned praise from environmental groups for overseeing New York State’s cleanup of Love Canal in Niagara Falls and for blocking the application of chemical insecticides to kill gypsy moths on New York State Forest Preserve land.

When Mario Cuomo succeeded Carey as Governor in January 1983, Mr. Flacke was replaced at DEC because he had supported Gov. Cuomo’s Democratic rival, New York City Mayor Ed Koch, in the Democratic primary. Six years later, however, Gov. Cuomo chose Mr. Flacke to serve on a 14-member Commission appointed to chart new state policies to govern the Adirondacks in the 21st century.

Mr. Flacke dissented sharply from the staff and majority of commissioners who prepared the Report of the Commission on the Adirondacks in the Twenty-First Century and issued his own minority report. He called for balancing environmental protection with reasonable local economic growth and argued that some recommendations in the majority report would send the Adirondack region into permanent economic decline, collapse local communities, and deprive full-time residents of jobs and essential services.

“The commission bases its conclusions and recommendations largely on the premise that a development crisis exists in the Adirondack Park, when it does not. It judges the Adirondack Park Agency act to be ill-conceived and inadequate, when it is still one of the most stringent in the nation. The Adirondack Park Agency is deemed ineffective and in need of replacement when improvements can easily be made within the existing administrative framework,” Mr. Flacke wrote to Gov. Cuomo.

Within weeks, Gov. Cuomo told The New York Times that Mr. Flacke’s concerns had persuaded him to postpone changes in Adirondack policy. Instead, Gov. Cuomo invited the Adirondack Planning Commission, a local government group Mr. Flacke had inspired,

to negotiate directly with state officials on Adirondack issues, setting the stage for direct state-local talks for many years to come.

Mr. Flacke was active in many state and local organizations. He was a longtime member of the Board of Governors of Glens Falls Hospital and Adirondack Health Services; a former director of Evergreen Bank and BankNorth, successors to The First National Bank of Glens Falls, and a longtime director of paper manufacturer Finch, Pruyn & Co. Inc. of Glens Falls. He was a director of the New York Business Council, vice president of the New York Blue Line Council and a founding board member of North Country Ministry. In 1995, he was honored as the recipient of the Liberty Bell Award by the Warren County Bar Association.

Robert F. Flacke was born January 25, 1933, at Brady Maternity Hospital in Albany, N.Y., the son of Clara (Hohl) Flacke of Spisska Nova Ves, Czech Republic, and Joseph L. Flacke of Albany.

His survivors include his wife of 63 years, the former Jean McEnaney of Albany; their children: Nancy (Mark) Reuss of Loudonville, N.Y., Robert (Jean) Flacke Jr. of Diamond Point, N.Y., Diane (Bob) Peters of Delmar, N.Y., and Kathryn Flacke Muncil of Lake George, N.Y., and their nine grandchildren whom Mr. Flacke believed were the most important people in the world: Caroline Reuss (Michael Simonelli), Elizabeth Flacke Reuss, Amanda Muncil, Connor Robert Muncil, Kelly Muncil, Cara Jean Flacke, Maureen Flacke, Tess Flacke and Robert Peters.

Mr. and Mrs. Flacke were longtime communicants of Sacred Heart Roman Catholic Church in Lake George.

Calling hours will be held from 4 to 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 16, at Sacred Heart Church in Lake George.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 11 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 17, at Sacred Heart Church.

A community celebration of Mr. Flacke's life will be held immediately following the services at the Fort William Henry Hotel. All are invited.

In lieu of flowers, the family has suggested memorial contributions be made to Sacred Heart Church, 50 Mohican St., Lake George, N.Y. 12866.



# Comments

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“ Bob worked with my husband and me when he was the head of the Department of Environmental Conversation. What a wonderful experience. Bob will truly be missed. Harriette Sacklow (Wolkcas Communications).

**Harriette Sacklow** - November 18, 2018 at 04:01 PM