

# OBITUARIES

LONG ISLAND

## Paul Townsend, 86, advocated LI development

BY DENISE M. BONILLA  
STAFF WRITER

The life of Paul Townsend in many ways reflects the history of Long Island development itself. From his promotion of Levittown to his fighting Robert Moses to help preserve Fire Island to his more than four decades as editor of Long Island Business News, Townsend was an active and vocal advocate of economic development throughout his 86 years.

Once called the "Lion of Long Island," Townsend made it his personal mission to bring the Island out of the shadows of New York City and make it a powerful force in its own right. He died yesterday at his Bellport home from complications related to a pulmonary infection.

Born in Port Washington, Townsend grew up in Centerport and went on to receive a bachelor's degree from Hobart College and a law degree from Columbia University. He would later receive numerous honorary degrees, including an honorary doctor of laws from Dowling College and an honor-

ary doctor of humane letters and Presidential Medal from Hofstra University.

After receiving his law degree, Townsend went into the Army, serving in the Philippines with an intelligence unit. When he returned to the United States, he joined a Manhattan public relations firm and went to work for William Levitt.

It was while working for Levitt that he helped secure permission to use drywall construction that enabled the development of Levittown.

Townsend was later involved in the development of North Shore University Hospital, becoming chairman of its board.

At North Shore, Townsend met his future wife, Terry, who was a public relations employee with the hospital. Townsend, who was only at the hospital on occasion as a consultant, kept running into Terry and the two became friendly.

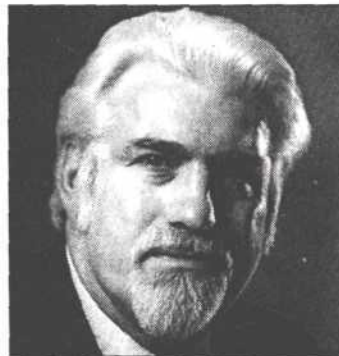
"One day, he just looked at me and said, 'Listen, we might as well do this right,'" she recalled. He asked her

out on a date and they were soon married.

The couple started their own public relations firms, but Townsend, who had been editor of his college newspaper, felt the call of the publishing world again and in the mid-1950s took over as editor of Long Island Business News, with his wife as publisher. His column in the weekly, Ronkonkoma-based paper, "The Townsend Letter," which he used to promote various causes, became widely read. He coordinated campaigns to save Republic Airport and to designate Nassau and Suffolk counties as a separate Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area.

"He was an advocate for change and good things and he used it to advance a lot of projects," his wife of 44 years recalled.

While not all of his causes were championed by the masses, one of his crowning achievements, his wife said, was when he opposed Robert Moses' plan to build a road through the Fire Island sand dunes. Seeing the project as a huge potential failure,



Paul Townsend in 1999

Townsend worked with a resident, as well as the federal government, to help establish the Fire Island National Seashore.

After suffering a stroke in the mid-1990s that left him paralyzed on his right side, Townsend wanted to move closer to the water, and he and his wife relocated from Floral Park to Bellport. He continued to work, but after being the editor of Long Island Business News for 45 years, he sold the publication to Dolan Media in 1998.

Townsend, who was instru-

mental in the establishment of the nonsectarian Mill River and Old Westbury golf clubs, amassed many accolades throughout his life, including receiving the Long Island Association's first Lifetime Achievement Award, which he shared with his wife. He also served on the board of Dowling College, which named its business school after both Townsends in June.

Even in his later years, Townsend remained resolute in his role as advocate and promoter of development on the Island.

When he was toasted by other business leaders in 2000, he told the crowd, "I've found the greatest satisfactions in life are from giving, not getting."

In addition to his wife, Townsend is survived by a daughter, Wendy Townsend, of Seattle; sons Tobin of Manhattan and Kim of Glen Head; a brother, Richard of upstate Auburn; a sister, Bernice Perks of Centerport; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at All Saints Episcopal Church in Great Neck at 11 am on May 20.