

Germano's Life Is Not a Crash Course

BY REBECCA FREUND

"I won't retire until they sprinkle my ashes on the gas pumps out there," says Joseph Germano, pointing to the front lot of his beloved Mamaroneck Garage on Mamaroneck Avenue. Germano has owned and run this Westchester landmark for over 50 years and shows no signs of quitting now.

If the garage can be deemed a landmark, then certainly the same can be said of the vibrant 67-year-old businessman who has lived and worked in Westchester since his birth. Germano has always called Mamaroneck his home and Westchester's village on the harbor has benefited from the decades of dedication and love he has shown his community.

Around the walls of his offices are photographs that by themselves could have told the story of Germano's life. There are a few recurring themes: the Marine Corps, boating, golf and the garage. Our interview covered all these subjects, but it was the character of the man behind the face in the pictures that added sparkle to the stories he told.

Germano unfolded the pages of his life with the drama and "good-old-days" nostalgia of a historian lecturing on his area of expertise. "It all began in a section of Westchester called the Strawberry Patch," he starts, and his audience is instantly captured. Imagine playing in the fields of Mamaroneck Avenue Grammar School at the age of five, and then looking from the window of a business you built across the street onto those same grounds filled with new faces some 60 years later. Imagine paddling a canoe with young friends through the waters near Greenhaven and sailing

own boat, reminiscing with the same friends who now work a block away at a car wash.

Germano need not imagine, for these visions are realities for the man who has spent his entire life making memories in the community.

When asked to recount the best days of his life, Germano does not hesitate. He recalls bicycling with friends at the age of nine, and being stopped by a man who wanted to know if they were interested in helping out at a nearby golf course. Germano and his entourage spent the next five years working as caddies and learning to play golf, a sport which still draws the Mamaroneck mechanic to the greens when he can get away. "I loved to give that little extra bit of service that you don't find today," says Germano, and this motto from his caddying days has added to the success of his garage business.

It was a saying that helped him through his years in the Marines as well, claims Germano. When he and a friend enlisted in 1943 at the age of 17, Germano took his first trip outside of Westchester to New York City.

Once again in Mamaroneck after the war, he and his brother, Carmello, started a tow truck operation with 37 employees and 15 trucks. The first years brought hard work and long hours that sometimes meant, "sleeping with the telephone by my bed," says Germano. The struggle paid off, he proudly recalls, when his company won a contract in 1959 to tow cars on the newly opened route 95. Germano went to wheel alignment school where he developed his specialty. The rest, he says, was learned from magazines. Believing that any one

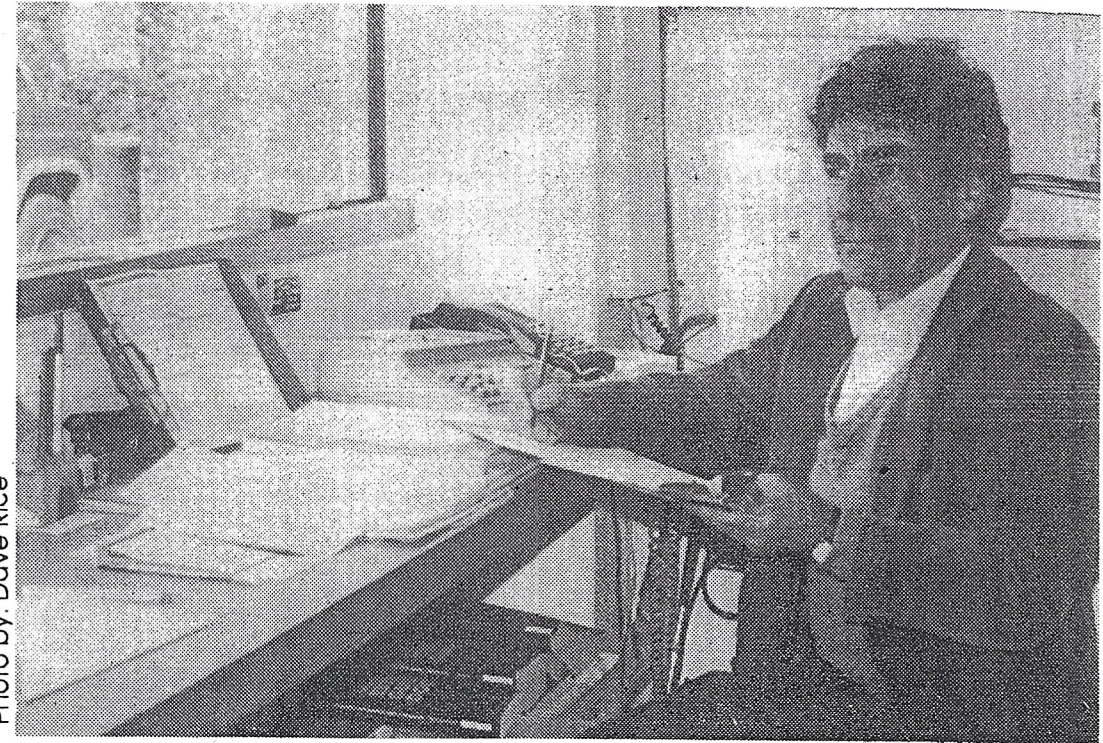


Photo by: Dave Rice

Joseph Germano has lived in Mamaroneck most of his life. He still sees the same friends he knew as a youngster and visits the landmarks of his youth.

sure that his four daughters all learned to change a flat tire and drive a stick-shift car.

Germano has established a reputation not only as a good mechanic but as a brilliant source of sound advice. Friends and employees consult him on almost any topic and he is quick to supply them with answers. He is encyclopedic—well-rounded with plenty of natural smarts. He has made a name for himself with the sermon-like lectures he gives to all prospective employees, stressing the rewards and satisfaction of hard work.

Although he still believes in hard work, Germano is cutting back on the business he has worked so hard to build. He is returning

beginning of his career.

Germano has given to the community from which he feels he has received so much. He has sponsored children's teams throughout the area and donated the land on which the Mamaroneck Rescue Squad now stands.

"I have everything right here," Germano boasts, "family, the business, the water and my golf." With all this around him, he has everything he needs to keep him in our area for the next 60 years. With some luck, perhaps he will schedule a tentative interview date with us. You can be sure there will be much more to report.

Rebecca Freund is a freelance writer