

DEDICATION



John R. French, Jr.
Select Board Member 1997-2018

In 2019, the Town of Camden is pleased to dedicate the annual report in honor of one of our longstanding, tremendously dedicated community leaders: John R. French Jr.

Since retiring in 2018 (at least for now!) from the Select Board after seven consecutive three-year terms, John has remained an active and engaged community member and leader. Whether he's attending Select Board meetings to speak as a member of the public, participating formally as a member of the Budget Committee or continuing the decades-old tradition of discussing all manner of town issues with residents and officials who frequent his auto repair shop; John's dedication to the community remains unwavering.

In 2018, John proposed that the town form a Charter Commission to revisit the Town Charter, our guiding document. As one of the members of the newly-fledged commission, John has once again stepped up to serve the community.

During his tenure on the Select Board, John served as chair for several terms, including his most recent one. He was elected in 1997 alongside the late Leonard Lookner and while the two did not always agree, they were dear friends and harbored an immense respect for one another. As John was fond of saying, "the disagreements always end there," gesturing to the door of the French Conference Room (Washington St. Conference Room) that was renamed in his honor when he decided not to seek re-election as a Select Board member.

John's acceptance of all opinions and patience with those that differ from his own is among the myriad of qualities that continue to serve John and the community well during his legacy of public service.

Each time John ran for Select Board, he was not only successful in his bid, but never failed to receive the largest number of votes of any candidate in the race, further demonstrating the community's confidence in his leadership.

John spent most of his boyhood in Camden, living for a time on Curtis Island where his father was the lighthouse keeper. John matriculated in the Camden school system and went on to further his education in carpentry. Instead, he became an auto mechanic and his career continues today as the owner and operator of Coastal Automotive in Camden.

In August of 1977, John married Julie in a ceremony on Bay View Street in Camden, and the two remain happily married today. Their sons, Bill and Christopher, both reside in Maine and have four children between them. John's grandchildren, ranging in age from four to 23, hold a special place in his heart.

With his sons, he participated as a pack leader in both Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts for a number of years.

Prior to joining the Select Board, John was a committed volunteer firefighter in Camden for 21 years. Though his tenure on the Select Board overlapped briefly with his time on the Fire Department, he remained committed to facilitating excellent and economical public safety solutions from his spot on the dais.

Always quick to credit others, John would often remark on the dedicated community volunteers that serve on all manner of town committees. While immensely respectful of his position and the processes, John was always quick with a laugh or follow-up question as Select Board chairman. He made it clear that all voices were important, even on nights with lengthy agendas.

Always thoughtful and compassionate, John has been quick to help those in need and has remained a dedicated friend and advisor to many municipal servants. Additionally, his desire to recognize others has always usurped the accolades he has received from the community.

John has always championed community engagement, encouraging residents to participate and use their voices -- both at regularly scheduled Select Board meetings and the town's annual meeting each June.

In June 2018, he told Susan Mustapich of The Camden Herald that he used to joke about getting a bus and picking residents up to bring them to Town Meeting.

“The Town Meeting is their chance to shine,” he said to Mustapich of residents. “Their time to vote, and hold their hand up and say yes, no or maybe. It's a Town Meeting government, not a council. It's all about them. Town people are the legislative body.”