

Nontas Constantine Kontes

1921-2020

Veteran, Remarkable Businessman, Artist, Philanthropist
and
Mentor

Dear Jane ,

Nontas was truly one of the most industrious men in our region. He was exemplary of the Greatest Generation, as described by journalist and author Tom Brokaw: an immigrant, a veteran, and a business leader. Before his brother's passing, any time I encountered him he was with Jim, fishing, hunting, discussing business. or eating at the Olympia Restaurant or Eric's Lunch.

I did not know Nontas or Jim as well as my husband did, and it is through Peter's stories that I continually got greater insight into these remarkable men.

I have vivid memories of some of our first meetings. They include them on their fishing boat; they were serious but at the same time you could tell they were enjoying themselves. In fact they always seemed very focused on whatever they were doing. That's not to say they didn't like being entertained by the antics of a friend, and the twinkle in their eye showed that humor did not escape them. Nontas had a dry wit and his delivery included perfect timing.

Their life's work was scientific glassware and it sustained many families. Glass was both their passion and their hobby. Once I saw them working, near the end of the day, on paperweights at the factory. They were true artists, not just run of the mill hobbyists but gifted craftsmen whose weights are displayed in international museums. The clarity of their glass is something that earlier artisans did not achieve but that is now emulated. They pioneered the use of scientific glass, which brought a new brilliance to weights. They also mentored glass artists and supported their education as well as that of commercial tradesmen.

Nontas and Jim were very concerned about the loss of fish to the atomic power plant along the Delaware, and called me on more than one occasion to let me know that CU Maurice River needed to be more diligent about addressing those losses. They were both generous in their continual support of our organization.

They jointly made me a paperweight and with their usual modesty they sent it to me with a short note, thanking me for my work in local conservation. I treasure the piece, knowing that they were not likely to bestow empty compliments.

Sometimes I would come upon them when they were eating out. They seemed to hold court, asking a question of those who joined them and being very interested in the response. They were absorbers and not much for small talk, but many topics piqued their curiosity.

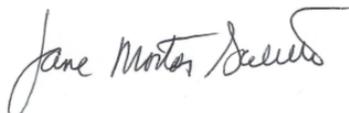
I would see them at events where they had made something happen for the community, such as the YMCA Kontes Pool that they were responsible for funding and making happen. They were generally reticent and modest. If you thanked them they generally acknowledged you with a nod and stiff jaw, and somehow you knew they were moving on to their next task.

Nontas was a bachelor and his nephews, niece, and cousins were all very close to him.

We offer our condolences to the family; Nontas's steady, thoughtful presence will be missed.

Their obituary captures Nontas very well; it appears below.

Sincerely,



Jane Morton Galetto
CU Maurice River Board President

Nontas Constantine Kontes

Vineland - Nontas Constantine Kontes passed away peacefully after a life well lived at the age of 99 years old. He was born February 5, 1921 in Vineland, N.J. His parents, Gustas (Gus) V. and Hariklia (Koula) Kontes, who immigrated from the Island of Crete and city of Athens, Greece returned to their homeland with Nontas, (age 5), his sister Helen Irene and his brothers Bill and Jim (all now deceased) and lived there for approximately four years. When the family returned to Vineland, Nontas spoke no English. When he graduated from Vineland High School, he began a career as an apprentice in a small local glass company learning a myriad of tasks from sweeping the floors to glass blowing. In 1942 he and his two brothers co-founded Kontes Glass Co. which manufactured scientific and laboratory glassware.

During World War II, he served as a boatswain's mate in the U.S. Navy. When he returned to civilian life, he continued as a partner and officer in Kontes Glass. In time, the Company grew to employ over 300 people. In 1982, the Company was sold to Owens Illinois. A division of Kontes, H.S. Martin Inc., was retained by Nontas and Jim. It became a thriving family business.

In 1975, Nontas and Jim began to pursue a hobby of making glass paperweights. Their friendship with world famous, American paperweight artist, Charles Kaziun, and many others greatly influenced and inspired them.

Their years of experience in scientific glass blowing allowed them to be resourceful and innovative. So, together the brothers learned through trial and error and exploration of the necessary techniques of formulating clear crystal, stable colors, building custom made tools, fixturing and annealing equipment. Frequently, the brothers could be found seated at their long wooden bench working with various glass burners to manipulate colorful glass canes creating delicate parts they would later encapsulate into paperweights. Their vast knowledge enhanced their ability to achieve excellent results in fabrication and artistry. What started as a hobby eventually brought both brothers well deserved celebrity with art glass and paperweight collectors. Nontas became best known for his vegetable and fruit basket weights although he also created floral motifs.

Being an avid outdoorsman through the years, he continued his life long interest in hunting small game, ducks, geese and sora rail birds. At family water fowl dinners, with his typical sense of humor, he would announce that "No one has to worry about finding bird shot while enjoying my ducks. I always shoot them in the head"! Also, he was an ardent ocean fisherman. He spent many enjoyable summer week ends with his "fishing buddies" in Cape May, N.J. where he kept a custom fishing vessel, The Prowler. He even travelled internationally to sport fish for Marlin, Sailfish, Tuna and Tarpon.

Throughout his life he was very interested in the welfare of his family, friends and community. He generously contributed where he saw a need. He was a mentor to students learning the trade of glass blowing at the Salem County Vocational and Technical institute and hoped to perpetuate future generations in the glass industry here in America.

His charitable contributions extended to Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center in Millville, NJ and also to the YMCA in Vineland where he always remembered he had benefited greatly as a youth. He was a devoted son, brother and uncle. He held his Greek heritage and religion close to his heart. He conducted himself with determination, high moral standards, steadfast opinions and unwavering belief in his convictions. He lived for his family, friends and tried to make the world here in America a little better place. He was the son of an immigrant candy maker and did all he could to make the promise of the "American Dream" and a life of freedom come true for himself and his family.

He is survived by his nephews: John L. Treires (Eileen) of Vineland, NJ; John C. Treires (Alexandra) of Morristown, NJ; C. William Kontes (Iris) of Hobe Sound, Fla; James E. Kontes (Vivian); niece: Valerie Kontes Baron

(Robert) of Port Elizabeth, NJ. He is also survived by many cousins and god children all of whom will miss him greatly. Funeral service was private. Donations in memory of Nontas C. Kontes can be made to: Vineland YMCA, 1159 E. Landis Ave., Vineland, NJ 08360 and St. Anthony's Greek Orthodox Church, 430 W Walnut Rd Vineland, NJ 08360. To e-mail condolences & or tributes please visit www.pancoastfuneralhome.com

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