

Regis Lee turned in a job well done

(Editor's Note — This column by Ron Paglia initially appeared in The Valley Independent on Wednesday, Jan. 3, 1979.)

Chewing the fat — and bending an elbow — at Vic's Tavern in North Charleroi one day in 1950, Regis Lee, Bert Brown and Vic Hladik Sr. decided it was high time "to do something for the kids" of their community.

Pay tribute to the young people of North Charleroi attending Charleroi High School was their idea.

They were joined in their efforts by others — men like Renato (Call Me Cap-py) Cappelli and Bennie Trnavsky — and the results of their dedicated work was the formation of an organization called the Toast To Our Stars Club.

Today, nearly 29 years later, the unique TTOS organization is still offering praise to the young people — scholars and athletes — of North Charleroi. It is still alive.

Regis Lee is not.

Regis Lee, one of the founders of the TTOS and police chief in North Charleroi for 28 years, was buried yesterday. When he died at age 65, he took with him a record of community service rivaled by few in this area.

"He did a lot more for the town than many people realize," said a man who was a child of six or seven when Regis Lee began his career as a law enforcement officer. "He had a heart of gold."

Stories about Regis Lee are plentiful and colorful. He was a familiar, well-known figure to many people. Particularly motorists who drove through his community and watched him in action directing traffic at the busy intersection of Route 88 and the Charleroi-Monessen Bridge.

But, according to a guy who remembers Regis from his boyhood days on Liberty Ave. in North Charleroi, Mr. Lee was more than just a police officer who directed traffic.

"He was a symbol to us," the man, now closing in on



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40, recalled. "We'd walk up the hill from Liberty Avenue to the elementary school and there he was; Regis was waiting for us to make sure we got there safely. This was the 1940s and the streetcars were still running then and Regis watched out for all of us. People driving cars and other vehicles knew Regis meant business when he put up his hand for them to stop."

Perhaps it was appropriate that Regis Lee was one of the founders of the TTOS Club. He liked kids.

"Regis was chairman of the banquet for five or six years in the beginning," recalled Joe (Tiny) Wiehl Sr., the current chairman. "He looked forward to the banquets and seeing the young boys and girls being honored. And remember, he was the one who brought the school crossing guards every year. He'd go out and solicit the money to pay for their tickets and make sure they all got there."

There were a few times, another TTOS observer noted, when Regis Lee dug deep into his own pocket to get the school crossing guards to the TTOS affair.

"It was a personal thing with him," the man said. "Those kids were special to him and so were the crossing guards. They were like family to him."

Mr. Lee was presented a plaque for his efforts with the TTOS at their dinner in 1975. He accepted it quietly — in much the same manner when he retired as police chief on Sept. 1, 1973.

"Just tell people how I really am," Lee told a reporter at the time of his retirement. "I don't want any fanfare."

Regis Lee looked back on his job, one of the longest law enforcement careers in the Mon Valley, as "some-

thing that had to be done." The pay for a job which as often as not required him to work during the early morning hours wasn't much, he reminisced when he retired.

But he had no regrets.

"I just tried to perform my job in the most honest and proficient manner that I knew how," he said.

That is not an easy task for any police officer, particularly one who for so many years was the only full-time lawman in a town as small and often "intimate" as North Charleroi.

According to Mr. Lee, sometimes it hurt him more than the person he had to arrest.

But his philosophy as a police officer was to use "common sense" and "try to place yourself in the shoes of the person you were about to deal with."

"I always treated people like I would want to be treated myself," was Regis Lee's version of the Golden Rule.

He followed that theory and mandate for 28 years as chief of police — and throughout his life. He took pride in anything he did.

He was a man dedicated to his role as a public servant; a man dedicated to upholding the law and serving others in many ways. Many people were touched by his presence and his actions as a policeman and as a man.

A veteran of the U.S. Army who saw action in both the Pacific and European theaters with the First Special Service Force, Regis Lee spent nearly half his life — most of his adult years — serving his country, his community and his fellow man. He did it well.

Postscript

Please keep in mind that the Toast To Our Stars banquet marked its 68th birthday earlier this year. It is one of the oldest affairs of its kind in western Pennsylvania. The man mentioned above who recalled Regis Lee from his childhood days in North Charleroi is now 79.