

Maryland Politics

# At funeral, personal and political tributes to Marvin Mandel

By Josh Hicks September 3 at 7:27 PM

Amid many eulogies on Thursday praising former Maryland governor Marvin Mandel as a political giant, his eldest son reminded mourners that his father was also an adored and dedicated family man.

“There *was* life before Annapolis,” Gary Mandel said to the crowd gathered at Sol Levinson & Bros. Funeral Home in Pikesville. “I want everyone to know that he was more than just a politician.”

Gary Mandel recalled hunting, fishing and watching sports with his dad, who served as governor from 1969 to 1979 and died Sunday at 95. He also remembered that his father, a practicing lawyer before he became governor, would sometimes wake him in the wee hours of the morning to go bail someone out of jail.

“He just hated to go by himself,” Gary Mandel said.

Marvin Mandel’s stepson, Paul Dorsey, described Mandel as a passionate fan of Maryland sports teams. He once bit through the stem of his pipe when a University of Maryland basketball player missed a free throw, said Dorsey, adding that the former governor was equally dedicated to his grandchildren’s athletic endeavors, regularly attending their games.

“He had two loves in his life — his family and the state of Maryland,” Dorsey said.

Mandel’s home life had its tumultuous aspects, too. His first marriage, to Barbara “Bootsie” Mandel, ended with a much-publicized affair and a bizarre separation that saw the governor leave the executive mansion to live with his then-mistress, the late Jeanne Dorsey, whom he later married.

Any animosity Barbara Mandel felt toward her ex-husband was not apparent on Thursday, however. She attended the funeral, beaming as her son delivered his eulogy. Later, at Lakemont Memorial Gardens in Davidsonville, she was the first family member to shovel a scoop of dirt onto her ex-husband’s casket.

“God bless you, darling,” she said.

The funeral for Mandel, the only Jewish governor in state history, combined Jewish ritual with all the usual ceremonies that take place with the burial of a former governor, including honor guards from the Maryland State Police and National Guard as well as an Army band that sounded taps and played “America the Beautiful.”

Family members and loved ones followed Barbara Mandel in nudging scoops of soil onto the coffin, at first using the back side of the shovel, in accordance with a Jewish custom that calls for the task to be performed by loved ones but for them to express reluctance as they do it. The heat index reached a sweltering 101 degrees.

Various members of Maryland's political establishment delivered remarks during the funeral, including Gov. Larry Hogan (R), U.S. Rep. Steny H. Hoyer (D-Md.), former congressman Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.) and former governor Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R).

"In a sense, Governor Marvin Mandel was the architect of modern Maryland," Hogan said. "No other executive in our history, before or since, has ever had the lasting impact on all three branches of government that he did."

Mandel was a member of the Maryland House of Delegates for 17 years, serving as speaker from 1964 to 1969. The legislature elected him to finish the term of Gov. Spiro T. Agnew (R), who had resigned to become Richard M. Nixon's vice president.

He won two more terms to become one of Maryland's longest-serving and most successful governors. His accomplishments included reorganizing the sprawling state government into 12 departments led by secretaries; helping to lay the groundwork for Maryland's mass-transit system; and establishing the state's first nomination commission to help identify candidates for judicial office.

Mandel went on to become a political mentor to future generations of elected officials — Democrats and Republicans alike.

Mandel's legacy was also marked by a 1977 conviction for mail fraud and racketeering, and he served 19 months in prison before President Ronald Reagan commuted his sentence to time served. A federal judge overturned the conviction in 1987.

The honorary pallbearers Thursday included Baltimore Orioles owner Peter Angelos, U.S. Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-Md.), former congressman and NBA player Tom McMillen (D-Md.), state Comptroller Peter Franchot (D) and Court of Special Appeals Judge Stuart R. Berger.

Mfume ended his eulogy Thursday by bidding Mandel "farewell and *sine die*," referring to the Latin term used at the close of a legislative session.

---

Josh Hicks covers Maryland politics and government. He previously anchored the Post's Federal Eye blog, focusing on federal accountability and workforce issues.

---