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# Former Del. Joseph J. 'Sonny' Minnick, politician and restaurant owner, dies

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The Baltimore Sun

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Dundalk community member and former Delegate 'Sonny' Minnick has died. He was 82.

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**J**oseph J. "Sonny" Minnick, a retired restaurant owner who served in the Maryland House of Delegates and was a popular member of the Dundalk community, died of a blood disease Monday at Stella Maris Hospice in Timonium. He was 82.

House Speaker Michael E. Busch, an Annapolis Democrat, recalled Minnick as a lawmaker who stayed closely attuned to his constituents in Dundalk and Essex.

"He believed in the working man and woman," Mr. Busch said. "He understood the struggles of the small business person. He was a true community representative in every sense of the word."

Others recalled Mr. Minnick as a conservative Democrat with broad popular appeal. He was a former chairman of the Baltimore County delegation.

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"He was a salt-of-the earth guy who represented the essence of eastern Baltimore County," said Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Joseph Bartenfelder, who served on the Baltimore County Council. "He worked well with Republicans and Democrats and was a great friend of former governors Bob Ehrlich and William Donald Schaefer."

Born in Dundalk, he was the son of Daniel J. Minnick Sr. and Dorothy Mileski.

He attended Dundalk High School and served in the Navy from 1952 to 1956. He attended Dundalk Community College and Essex Community College.

He and his brother ran the restaurant, Minnick's, located on Sollers Point Road.

"My grandfather had a temporary license to open New Years' Eve in 1934," said his brother, Daniel Minnick, who also served in the House of Delegates. "When Sonny got married in 1968, we changed from a night club to a restaurant. Our specialty was sour beef and dumplings."

The family also did catering and brought their sour beef to German festivals for many years.

"At a time when restaurants' tabs have zigged while the economy zagged, Minnick's has lowered prices for dinner in an area hard hit by layoffs in industry," said a 1982 Evening Sun review, which described the signature sour beef specialty as "well marinated and tender" while the "dumplings were light and fluffy ... and the ginger snap gravy was properly tart."

Family members said Mr. Minnick prepared the dish until he sold the business several years ago.

Maryland House Minority Leader Del. Nic Kipke recalled Mr. Minnick as a lawmaker who was popular with colleagues of both parties.

"He was a little bit of a prankster," said Mr. Kipke, an Anne Arundel County Republican. "He would do pranks on other delegates."

"For a short guy, he stood tall in that delegation, and led it and worked hard to build a consensus for Baltimore County," said the Senate's J.B. Jennings, who also represents Baltimore County. "He was always telling jokes. He always kept it entertaining on the floor."

Colleagues recalled Mr. Minnick's attention to the needs of his district.

"Sonny was a proud member of the Minnick family who had been involved in politics since 1966," said Tom Toporovich, former secretary to the Baltimore County Council and a longtime friend.

"He was a well-regarded chairman of the Baltimore County Democratic Delegation," Mr. Toporovich said. "From my point of view, he was always easy to work with and more than cooperative, and he was able to deliver unanimous votes from the delegation. He was always interested in funding for Baltimore County public schools."

Baltimore County Councilman and former delegate Wade Kach served alongside Mr. Minnick on the House Economic Matters Committee, where he became impressed with his colleague's grasp of Maryland's complex liquor laws.

"The alcohol laws in the state of Maryland are so confusing that for someone to come close to mastering them is saying something," said Mr. Kach, a Republican.

Mr. Minnick served in the Maryland House of Delegates from 1988 to 1990 and again from 1995 to January 2015.

"He represented the people well during his time in Annapolis," said former Sen. Norman R. Stone Jr. "He voted the way his constituents wanted him to and he was a good legislator."

"Sonny was lot of fun and upbeat most of the time," Mr. Stone said. "I never knew him to be down."

A funeral Mass will be offered at 10 a.m. Friday at Our Lady of Hope Roman Catholic Church, 7945 N. Boundary Road, where he was a member.

In addition to his brother, survivors include his wife of 48 years, Barbara Nastalski, former general manager of the restaurant-catering business; a son Christopher J. Minnick; two daughters, Danielle Cogar and Barbara Morse; and six grandchildren.

*Reporters Pamela Wood and Michael Dresser contributed to this article.*

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