

NICK PLANAMENTO ON LOVE LANE, HISTORY, AND SOUTHOLD'S 375



Q: How did you come to the North Fork?

A: Growing up I always enjoyed the North Fork – it's a place I dreamed of living because it reminded me of Mayberry RFD! We actually called it HOOTERVILLE from Green Acres-fame. Everyone was so friendly and helpful – excited by newcomers. The level of hospitality was different than today; the North Fork wasn't yet 'discovered'.

Cousins of mine have a large farm where they trained Thoroughbreds and in the early 90's planted their first vines. I was invited to come help them set up their retail operation when they decided to open a winery tasting room—I had substantial sales experience in both retail and wholesale. My partner and I made all the point of sales displays and set up the shop based on our production of French Provencal home furnishings. It was beautiful – real North Fork and truly special!

At the time my partner and I were living in Greenwich and our business there was the victim of an eminent domain action – it was time to move. Pieces of my life puzzle just fell into place.

Q: You're very involved in Southold Town, particularly for a relative late comer. You're on the committee organizing the celebration of the Town's 375th anniversary, and you're on the Architectural Review Committee, and goodness knows what else. How did you get so involved?

A: I've always been involved in the communities I live in and like to support various organizations where I can make a difference. My parents encouraged 'volunteerism'. I love participating and getting to know people. One of the things that really appealed about the North Fork was that it is a small town community; it's possible for every person who decides to get involved to make a real difference.

We know each other. While a newcomer and not raised here – my mother's family has roots in Greenport shipbuilding – tracing our family to 19th C. German immigrants – I have always embraced the local community and worked to fit in, rather than disrupt.

Q: So sure, you're a participating, community oriented guy as a general matter. But still, how did you go from new arrival to active community member?

A: Through my business. I've always had my real estate license, but when we moved here we had a wholesale retail business in home furnishings and high end luxury items from the south of France and the Mediterranean. In addition to our showrooms in NYC, Atlanta, Chicago, Dallas and San Francisco, we opened a small store on Love Lane, and ran it for about 10 years. It was a really popular destination on the most visible corner, and that's how I met a ton of people in the community.

People would come into the shop and invite us over for cocktails and discussion. Everyone welcomed us in a typical North Fork way! Also, In olde Nantucket speak – we 'gammed' – that's Whaler's-talk for chewing the fat. While my shop was not to everyone's taste or budget – all kinds of people came in and we'd talk and talk. Life moved more slowly then. I got to know people: everyone from a potato farmer to a vineyard owner and the different local vendors I used for plant material and other local products I sold.

It helped having two Golden Retrievers as 'greeters' – when they passed a few years ago the sympathy cards came in. Everyone LOVED Schuyler & Fleur. You literally had to step over them to get into the shop brimming with beautiful things. Also, Love Lane was very different at this time. The focus of many people in our community was towards modernization and many didn't understand the value of a historic, pedestrian friendly shopping area like Love Lane, which had several empty storefronts. The only people still there from this time is Cecily Jaffe, the owner of Cecily's Love Lane Gallery, and Rosemary Batchellor of The Village Cheese Shop – both highly supportive of 'the group'.

As a result I was invited to participate in the Mattituck Stakeholders and we reported back to the Town Planning Department. My partner and I saw what Love Lane could be, and one of the first things that we did was we put together The Love Lane Group (of all the merchants with the help of the Mattituck Chamber of Commerce) to really promote Love Lane. People embraced this. We really helped make it the destination it is today. We did outdoor movie nights, the 1st Potato Festival, we had a Troubadour – and caroled at Christmas with roasted chestnuts and local, sparkling wine - all sorts of special things to draw attention to the valuable and historical significance of the 'Heart of the North Fork'. I have a wonderful award given to me for my efforts at this time – it's a framed painting of my shop by local artist, Audrey Watson Wigley with a plaque of appreciation.

Q: Love Lane is a real treasure, such a walkable, small town shopping experience. And I see your immediate community activism and understand how you met so many people. But what brought you to the 375th Anniversary celebration committee?

Well, history is one of my passions. One of the things I love about the North Fork and Southold in particular is the sense of history; many of the descendants of the founding families still live here. Our cultural identity is intact. The building that I owned on Love Lane was originally part of a much larger building that occupied the full lot – the corner intersection of Sound Avenue and Main Road.

Historically, the Main Road was called King's Highway and the corner was well known before the development of our Country and in fact, the Declaration of Independence was read from the broad south-facing porch. It's amazing what one can learn from talking with people

Think about it: Our community was founded more than 135 years before America declared independence, making us one of the oldest communities in North America. There was a whole history BEFORE our modern history – right here on Eastern Long Island. I got so caught up in it I joined my local historical society—Mattituck-Laurel and became a two term President of the Society.

In short, I have a strong appreciation for the past and I am committed to my community. Because of that it was a natural fit to be appointed by the Town Board to the Southold 375 Committee. The Committee is such a great mix of the old families and newer people who really appreciate our history. I love talking with other Committee members about their experiences, too – such as Jim Grathwohl and Gail Horton – both incredible 'local' experts!

Q: Is there something in particular people should know about the committee, its work, or the anniversary celebrations?

A: I think the first thing that is really important to recognize is the efforts of the Committee; we thank the Town Board for organizing and funding us, and everyone on the Committee for their efforts in celebrating our Town's birthday. Also, for the groups who are organizing events and the individuals who are volunteering. Thank you to Mark MacNish for his stellar job in updating and reinterpreting Jim Grathwohl's earlier celebratory logo. And of course, our Chairman – Herb Adler who attended the 1940 and other celebrations – what an honor for him to Chair this event!

We have a website that just launched, www.Southold375.com and a Facebook page (please like us!), where events are listed. In addition we have invited each community organization, like the chambers of commerce, like the wine council, and many others, to mark the occasion with their own event. We (the Committee) stand ready to help and support them.

A wonderful example of an organic event is an arts festival the Southold Presbyterian Church is organizing. That church was Southold's first, founded in the same year by the same people who founded the town. Also planned for August 1st is a parade celebrating the anniversary. I've seen pictures of the 1990 parade celebrating the 350th anniversary and well, I anticipate the same excitement! I'm hopeful a winery or one of the local brewer's will create a product. It's a wonderful opportunity for our community to promote itself and shine!

Q: Any events in particular you want to note?

A: The anniversary year kicked off with a January ceremony and cocktail party at historic Brecknock Hall. It was a huge success and enjoyed by all who attended. The facility there is truly special for Southold – if you have not visited PLEASE do so – you will be mesmerized by the beauty of the Floyd Mansion – owned by the son of the ONLY signer of the Declaration of Independence – from Long Island.

A biggie coming up is Mile Marker Day, on Saturday May 16. It's an interactive family day to bring recognition of Benjamin Franklin's post road mile markers – we are so fortunate to have so many in Town. This event was nurtured and developed by Committee member and event Chair Cork Maul. He is the steward of the May 16th event.

Q: What do you mean, mile markers? What's the event about?

Benjamin Franklin was the first postmaster, appointed under the British Crown, and he laid out the post roads—the delivery routes. The mile markers would measure the distance from county courthouse, and the distances were used to calculate postage. There's evidence Ben Franklin visited the North Fork twice in the 1750s, including measuring the miles, but the stone markers we have today date to the 1800s – they were originally wooden. Ben Franklin invented the 'Weasel' which calculated distance – much like a modern odometer in a car – however, in the modern version there is no 'pop'!

To participate in the event, go to the first mile marker in Laurel, 7 miles from the County Courthouse. It's the most western hamlet in our Town. Pick up a map, and answer the related question for the mile marker. At this time, you can reset your car's odometer, and as you wander along the old King's Highway visiting each mile marker, you can test the distances. At each marker there will be a person, or a business or other opportunity to interact to get the answers to all the questions.

At the end of the journey participants will meet Committee-member Dan McCarthy – a committed local historian, dressed as Ben Franklin, and will receive a beautiful postcard featuring artwork by local artist Allan Bull of Orient, and then the post card will be hand-cancelled by Ben Franklin using a government issued cancellation stamp, which will make these very collectable. That stamp will also be available for hand cancelling any mail in the Southold Post Office from April 25 to May 25th.

But again, that's just one event in a year filled with them.

Q: Wow, Mile Marker Day sounds like great family fun, and a really neat souvenir. Any other cool 375 schwag available?

A: We have other collectible memorabilia, such as a great mug featuring the Southold 375 logo and Southold hamlets – including Fishers Island, that are being sold to raise funds for their sale-related events, but the proceeds with participating we can't sell stuff. In another group, the North Fork Promotion Council, is facilitating their sale and will share the as a memento with participating groups and invest them in 375-related events. [Ed. Note: The North Fork Promotion Council owns and publishes GoNorthFork.]

You can make a \$10 donation via the site, www.Southold375.com and pick up your mug. It's a great gift item – we hope other organizations help collect donations for the mug to raise funds. I've already had inquiries from a couple of shops who want to help – I'm hoping a coffee shop or two will participate, along with the gift shops at our historical societies and museums – It's a great way to show civic pride! As of today, the Love Lane Kitchen will carry the mug.

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: As a local real estate professional, I am committed to my community, and one of my passions is working with sellers of historic homes. There are many homes here, rich in history with so many people that take a tremendous pride in maintaining them and who are willing to share them with the public. We are extremely fortunate.

It's my belief that history is living; we're enjoying and participating in it every moment. Everyone's actions are part of our current history, and I really encourage people to join and enjoy the local historical societies. These organizations are the keeper's of our community and need volunteers, donations and more recognition.

Our history, our cultural identity, our sense of community; that's what people come to Southold and the North Fork for.