

Mary Ann Has Done It All

by Sal Martoche

Mary Ann Lauricella has had an extraordinary and distinguished career as a communicator, which includes decades of community volunteer leadership. An award-winning journalist who went on to serve in numerous high level government and corporate positions, she now runs her own business, Lauricella Public Relations.

A graduate of the former Mount St. Joseph's Academy and Canisius College, the then 11-year-old pupil at St. Margaret's School, unbeknown to her parents, wrote a letter to Cy King, then the editor of the former Courier Express.

King was so impressed at her enthusiasm to be a journalist that he offered to meet with her in his office in downtown Buffalo, where she arrived thanks to the two tokens her mother gave her for bus fare. King told her journalism was a rough and tumble business and that she seemed like a sweet young lady. But, he said if she still felt committed to trying her hand at journalism, he would consider hiring her as a copy kid when she was 16. She accepted on the spot, and that was the beginning.

When Mary Ann was 18 and working at the paper, she was given the opportunity to become a fill-in reporter when someone left the Courier unexpectedly. Fortunately for her, the reporter decided not to come back and, fortunately for the Courier, its managers immediately recognized her talent. And so she became rather an oddity - a woman and a kid with big responsibilities.

During stints as a reporter and feature writer, she won the respect of her colleagues, most of whom were hard-boiled men. It wasn't long before the Buffalo Evening News, which had a significantly higher circulation than the Courier, wooed her away and soon offered her the opportunity to become the first female television critic for the News.

During her tenure as a reporter, Mary Ann won nine Page One awards for excellence in journalism as well as a national Telly award. The late editor at the News, Murray B. Light, wrote, "Mary Ann is a superb human being and one of the nicest people found in our business. She is

both a very good reporter, as well as writer."

Mary Ann went on to be named in 1982 as associate commissioner for public affairs for the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles, the first woman commissioner in the history of the department. One of her most significant accomplishments was the overwhelmingly successful STOP-DWI media campaign that won national and international awards and is still used as a model in New York and many other states.

Mary Ann then became an administrative vice president at the former Empire of America Bank before establishing her own firm. Lauricella Public Relations successes include serving for 10 years as the first publicist for the JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition.

She continues to serve as chair emeritus of the Buf-



**DMV Commissioner Les Foschio swears in
Mary Ann Lauricella as his associate commissioner**

falo-Toronto Public Media (WNED) Board of Trustees and, for 17 years, was the volunteer media chair of the Variety Club Telethon for Children's Hospital. Her list of community participation includes serving on the boards of Restoring Sight International, the Institute of the Sisters of St. Joseph, Arts in Education Institute, Automobile Club of Western and Central New York, Buffalo Philharmonic Board of Overseers, Canisius College Board of Regents and Board of Trustees, and the Niagara Partnership Small Business Council.

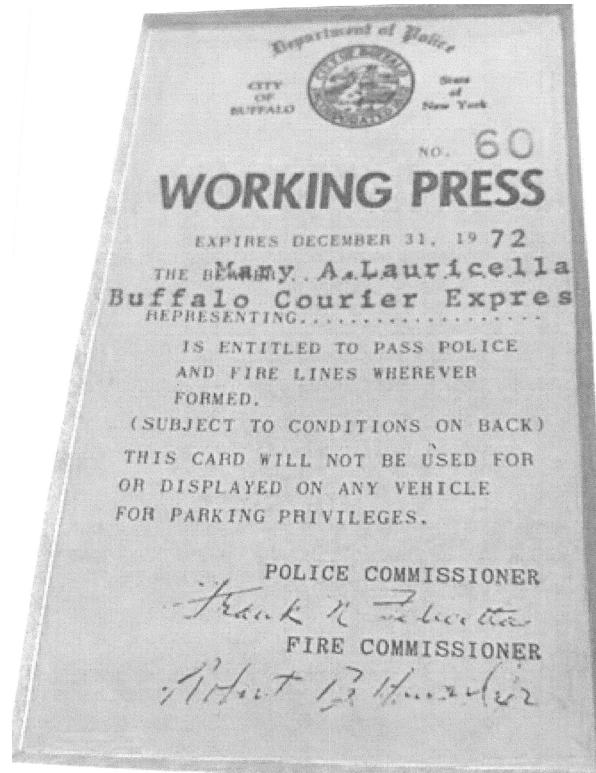
Canisius honored Mary Ann with its LaSalle Medal, which recognizes outstanding achievement and service to the university by an alumnus, and its Distinguished Alumni award. She was the first woman to receive the Canisius College Board of Regents Distinguished Citizens award and also was awarded The Buffalo Niagara Partnership's prestigious Athena Award.

Mary Ann's roots come from Sicily. An ancestor from Racalmuto, Padre Giuseppe Ella Lauricella, 1707-1780, has been declared a Servant of God in the church's canonization process. A book written about him traces their family's history in the town to the 1500s.

As a reporter, Mary Ann interviewed David Ben-Gurion at his home in Israel. She giggles as she recalls he held her hand during much of their interview, misheard her name as "Miriam" and thought she was Jewish. As a television columnist for the News, she interviewed such stars as Bob Hope, Lucille Ball, Mary Martin, and younger talents of that time, including Liza Minnelli, Robin Williams, John Candy, Tom Hanks, and many more.

Lee Coppola, former investigative reporter and retired dean of the Jandoli School of Communication at St. Bonaventure University, states that, "In the more than four decades I've known Mary Ann, she has never ceased to amaze me. Her industriousness is unmatched. Above all, I admire her consideration of others and the ethical way she has practiced all her professions."

Donald K. Boswell, the recently retired president of WNED, said, "Mary Ann Lauricella has to be the kindest spirit of anyone I know. Mary Ann is also one of the most incredible writers and public relations professionals in Western New York." The chairman of Try-It Distrib-



uting, Eugene Vukelic, echoed the praise, calling her “a fine person with grace and class” and “extremely loyal with a great sense of integrity and respect.”

Mary Ann has always understood the responsibility to pay it forward. That attribute was best exemplified by a 15-year-old Rose Ciotta, a student at Bishop O’Hearn, who went on to become a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. As Ciotta put it, “It started with a phone call asking Miss Lauricella if I could come to see her.... Mary Ann opened my eyes to a world of journalism that I could not have imagined. That was the beginning of my journey.”

Fr. Richard Reina, a close friend for many years, summed it up best. "Even before Mary Ann is recognized as a great professional, we must remember what an extraordinary human being she is, ethical and kind to everyone. I don't think Mary Ann ever made an enemy."

SI know that's true. I tried to find one and failed. Mary Ann Lauricella is a consummate professional and a beacon of excellence who can be depended on to give her readers, her employers and the public 100 per cent ethical, complete and accurate information. What a gift she is to her profession and her community.