

Burton Natarus, colorful former longtime 42d Ward alderman, dies at 86

 chicagotribune.com/news/obituaries/ct-burton-natarus-obituary-20200612-k5yebj62mnezhhh45jlyoiuvcy-story.html

Rick Pearson

Burton Natarus was alderman of Chicago's 42nd Ward for 36 years, delivering a scrappy, stream-of-consciousness style leadership to a bustling downtown ward with an oratory that marked a bygone era of a more colorful City Council.

Natarus, 86, who won nine elections from 1971 until his defeat in 2007 and was among the city's longest-serving aldermen, died Thursday. His family did not provide a cause of death.

The 42nd Ward has the highest profile in the city, encompassing the Loop, River North, the Magnificent Mile, Streeterville and the Gold Coast neighborhoods. It provided a vast stage and big political spotlight for Natarus, who was equal part showman and workhorse.

He was a power player in the development of the city's downtown landscape while also performing nitty-gritty services to a wealthy constituency. At the same time, he had a proclivity for honorary street signs and for rants against urban ills including boom boxes, the effluence of horse-drawn carriage rides, 4 a.m. bars, smoking, in-line skaters on sidewalks and parasailors on Lake Michigan.

"I got to have a little fun," Natarus once told the Tribune, acknowledging some of his council colleagues viewed him as an antiquated "buffoon."

"You got to lighten up a little bit. Sometimes when you lighten up, you get clear thoughts," he said.

Natarus was born and raised in Wausau, Wisconsin, where his mother and father operated a dry goods store with a lunch counter. He came to Chicago after graduating from the University of Wisconsin Law School and became a resident of the city's Near North Side in 1960.

He also was a graduate of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and later taught at Loyola University Chicago on the subject of local government. He served in the U.S. Army and the Army Reserves, earning the "jump wings" of a paratrooper.

He launched his political career as a volunteer for John F. Kennedy's 1960 presidential campaign, a move that later led to his induction into the political operation of George Dunne, the powerful Cook County Board president.

His first aldermanic victory came in 1971 and he held the office until his 2007 defeat by current Ald. Brendan Reilly by about 10 percentage points.

“Being an alderman down here, whether people know it or not, is just plain hard work,” said Natarus, who had often likened the post to being the “janitor” of his ward.

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“I am always available,” he said. “I don’t know how many aldermen have their (home) phones listed. I have never had — to the chagrin of a former wife — an unlisted phone, and people call me. If I am not home, I pick up the message and I call them back,” he said.

Natarus is survived by his son, Michael; daughter, Jill; and two grandchildren.

Services will be private.

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