

Newsday

LONG ISLAND

TUESDAY, JANUARY 4, 2011 LONG ISLAND EDITION

newsday.com

LI owes thanks to Matt Crosson

January 4, 2011



Late last month, death claimed Matt Crosson, a man who was one of Long Island's biggest and best advocates. It would be a terrible shame if we let his dreams and vision die with him.

There were certainly times when Crosson seemed like a lone voice crying in the wilderness, and he must have wondered whether anybody was listening. As head of the Long Island Association for 16 years - a position he left last year to lead the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce - he was far more than Long Island's cheerleader-in-chief.

His untimely death (due to complications from a stroke earlier this year) has already led to retrospectives on his career.

Though not a government official, he possessed the qualities

we always say we want in our elected representatives. He was a leader, he had courage and he was a conciliator who brought all sides to the table.

As head of Long Island's largest business group, Crosson was a strong advocate for the business community. But more than that, he had a vision that addressed the quality of life for all Long Islanders. He wasn't afraid to take on controversial issues, like building affordable housing and cutting the size of school district bureaucracies.

He was a skilled interviewer, bringing talents honed as a former prosecutor to the local television talk-show scene. Most important, Crosson was not content just to point out the problems of our region. He was dedicated to coming up with meaningful solutions.

One of the first things he did after taking over the Long Island Association in 1993 was to organize a summit of government, community and business leaders to identify the most crucial problems facing the region - with a mandate to come up with real solutions. It should surprise no one familiar with how things work in Nassau and Suffolk counties that few of the 254 recommendations contained in the subsequent "Long Island Action Plan" were ever implemented.

Most people would have rested on their laurels in just having produced such a momentous and significant document. Not Matt Crosson. He pushed on to create real initiatives that helped to expand technology on Long Island and preserve East End farmland, and championed affordable housing legislation. He used his vast and diverse relationships to forge coalitions between businesses and educators, civic associations and governments, and environmentalists and developers. Crosson discovered early on a very simple truth that eludes too many in positions of leadership: Nothing gets done without cooperation, and with it, anything is possible.

Long Island is at a crucial stage. Competing interests have meant little dialogue dedicated to producing a blueprint for the region's survival. NIMBYs battle with developers, unions battle with the anti-tax groups, and public officials battle among themselves. With rare exceptions, all are well-meaning and dedicated to their particular causes and points of view. But all the problems are critical, and all must be addressed if Long Island is to prosper. Yes, we need to preserve groundwater, but we must also implement sound economic development policies to provide jobs and keep people in their homes. Yes, we need to keep education at the highest level, but we must also cut the burden of property taxes on our residents.

The writer G.K. Chesterton once wrote, "We are all in the same boat in a stormy sea, and we owe each other a terrible loyalty." Nothing could sum up Long Island's situation more appropriately. It's something Matt Crosson clearly understood. His loss, felt most keenly by his wife and son, is shared by all of us who call Long Island our home, and we owe him a debt of gratitude. May we endeavor to repay that debt by working cooperatively toward effective solutions.