

“It is no exaggeration to say Phil’s work as an educator, leader in the cultural life of this city and as city historian has been a life changing experience for thousands of people.” – Saralie Bisnovich Pennington

In the long life of Waterbury, there are figures whose devotion to the city’s people and institutions goes far beyond the norm – and such is the case with Philip V. Benevento, Jr. His career as a much respected and beloved educator, dedicated supporter of local organizations, and keeper of the flame for Waterbury’s history mark him for inclusion onto the city’s short roster of indispensable men and women.

Philip Benevento was born in Waterbury on February 25, 1943, the second of three sons, to Philip and Edith Benevento. He attended Russell and Kingsbury grammar schools and graduated from Crosby High School in 1961. He went on to receive his BA (English and History) at UConn and then returned to Waterbury to begin a 34-year teaching career at Crosby. He later earned his MA (English Education) from UConn, a CAS (Literature) from Wesleyan University and a CAS (Administration and Supervision) from Southern Connecticut State University.

While at Crosby, Benevento became part of the very fabric of the school, enthusiastically involved not only in its academic life, but also in shaping the lives of the students there. He was the driving force of the English Department, which he chaired for 15 years. He taught everything from remedial classes to Advanced Placement courses, and he created courses – a drama elective, for instance, and creative writing – when he saw a need for them.

His devotion to the Crosby students went far beyond the classroom. He directed class plays, served as adviser to the school newspaper, led students on trips to Europe and Broadway, and, as part of his American literature class, led a much-anticipated annual pilgrimage to Salem, Mass. While at Crosby, Benevento also took on many curricular and administrative chores. He pushed to have more works by African American writers added to the English Department’s offerings; indeed, he headed up the curriculum committee of all three public high schools to update and improve courses and teaching methods. In addition to teaching at Crosby, Benevento taught courses at Naugatuck Valley Community Technical College, Taft School and Chase Collegiate School. He’s also taught courses on Twain, Hawthorne and Tennessee Williams for the OLLI program at UConn’s Waterbury campus.

Beyond this brilliant academic record are Benevento’s many contributions to Waterbury institutions and organizations. He was a member of the Silas Bronson Library’s Board of Agents for 25 years, including 8 as its president. He served on the boards of Seven Angels Theatre, the Waterbury Symphony, Riverside Cemetery and the Waterbury Education Association. He was an influential member of the Waterbury Hall of Fame Committee and co-chair of the Cass Gilbert City Hall Renovation Committee.

Benevento’s love of Waterbury and devotion to its



continuing story can perhaps be best seen in his service as City Historian, a post he occupied from 2004 to 2017. During that time, he found many ways to present the city’s narrative, from speeches and slide shows, to media appearances and trolley tours, to researching and providing answers or context to various contemporary issues. Over the course of time, many thousands benefited from his deep knowledge of the city and delighted in his lively retelling of it.

Benevento has received deserved recognition for his decades of excellent service. In 1985, he received the Excellence in Teaching Award from the University of Connecticut Alumni Association. In 2006, one of his former Crosby students, Louis Aburdene, established the Aburdene Family Scholarship Honoring Philip Benevento, a fund of some \$100,000 to generate scholarships for students at UConn Waterbury. In addition, in recognition of Benevento’s work as a local historian, two funds set up in his name promote education and cultural enlightenment – The Philip Benevento, Jr., History Internship at the Mattatuck Museum and The Philip V. Benevento Fund for Cultural Programs for Adults at the Silas Bronson Library.

Philip V. Benevento’s career proves that an individual can influence not only the lives of the many people who cross his path, but also the life of the city at large. Perhaps the love and attention he’s given to Waterbury can in some small part be returned with his induction into the city’s Hall of Fame.