

JOHN J. MARTINS MEMORIAL PARK by Peter Martin

As you drive south along Washington Street, you will see a construction project underway at the John J. Martins Memorial Park that is located just past the Van Zandt Avenue Pier. The 2015 winter edition of the *Green Light* had three photos of the park area showing the seawall of the park area with a title “MARTIN’S PARK WALL GETS A FACE LIFT”. I decided to do a bit of research to learn about the origins of this park, which honors one of my childhood friends. I contacted Newport’s historian, Patrick Murphy, who supplied me with the background information.

I learned that the park was dedicated on November 8, 1987 in honor of Newport native John J. “Jack” Martins, who was the owner/proprietor of his family’s liquor store at the corner of Third and Walnut Streets for over 20 years. The *Newport Daily News* published an article about the dedication ceremony the following day. Its article mentions that about 100 friends and relatives attended the dedication ceremony during which “Jack” was recognized for establishing the annual Point Cleanup Drive to eliminate litter and debris in the area. “He used to reward the participants with refreshments, games and prizes at a post-cleanup party he held in Hunter Park.” It continues, “In preparing the area, the City of Newport Recreation and Public Services department had removed a chain link fence that had been installed along the sidewalk. They installed the fence along the seawall in order to turn the area into a waterfront park”.

The *Green Light* published an article about the park in its December 1987 issue:

“Newport has a new park - its 35th - as of Sunday, Nov. 8th when the John J. Martins Memorial Park was dedicated. It is a small area bordering on Washington Street and overlooking the Bay, a spot which Jack loved and where he often walked.

Benches for the park were donated by the Friends of Jack Martins and the Point Association; landscaping was done by the city, and more will be done in the Spring.

Over 100 people were present and heard talks by William Gurney (City Director of Recreational and Public Services), Councilman Jack Crowley, Brian Burns (representing the Friends of Jack Martins) and Pete Peters of The Point Association.

A City Council proclamation was presented to the Martins family and Patricia Silveria (Jack’s Sister) spoke on behalf of the family.

The speakers emphasized Jack’s significant contributions to his neighborhood, his caring work with children, his desire to preserve the environment, and, above all, his love for family, friends and neighbors.

Although Jack died almost a year ago, his presence was very much felt by those who attended the ceremony. We are sure that his memory will long be preserved by the John J. Martins Memorial Park.
Virginia Covell”

So who was “Jack” Martins?

Jack was born in the Fifth Ward. His parents were Manuel and Margaret [O’Brien] Martins. He attended St. Augustin’s grammar school and went on to be a member of the class of 1956 at De La Salle Academy where he was a “three-letter” athlete. He was the captain of the high school’s basketball team.

Following his education, Jack migrated to the Point to run his family business thereby covering both “ends” of the community.

- i. <http://thepointassociation.org/resources/GreenLight/2015-Winter.pdf>
- ii. *Newport Daily News* – November 9, 1987.
- iii. <http://thepointassociation.org/resources/GreenLight/1987-December.pdf>

Author’s Note:

It was Terry Burns not Brian Burns who spoke on this occasion.