

Robert Thibault – July 15, 2020

MANCHESTER — Robert F. Thibault, 83, died on July 15, 2020, following an extended illness.

He was born in Manchester, N.H., on Dec. 25, 1936, son of the late Aime and Agnes (Vallee) Thibault. “Bob” developed a love for baseball on the sandlots of Manchester’s West Side. His talent for singing cultivated at a young age, he was formally trained throughout his youth. He attended Ste. Marie and St. Jean Baptiste elementary schools, producing and performing in ice skating shows for the Church’s benefit. A self-taught figure skater, he promoted, managed, and starred in these shows, alongside members of the Ice Capades performing group.

Robert’s vocal abilities became more widely recognized following his winning of the regional Ted Mack Amateur Hour competition (akin to today’s America’s Got Talent). He regularly performed in variety shows on WMUR-TV, WGIR, and WKBR-FM radio. During his high school years, he earned a scholarship to study at the New England Conservatory of Music. A 1954 graduate of Manchester High School West, he co-founded the school’s first glee club, which later matured into the earliest West High School chorus.

Upon graduation, Robert entered the Armed Services, enlisting in the U.S. Air Force, where he specialized in Communications and played on the baseball and football teams at RAF Woodbridge 605th, in the UK. As lead tenor and soloist for the Air Force Chorus, he traversed the globe. During those years, Robert appeared live as a soloist on radio stations, broadcasting coast-to-coast throughout the United States and Europe.

Following his honorable discharge from the service, Robert embarked on a career in show business. Under the stage name “Enrico DeCurtis,” he headlined as a featured vocalist in venues around the world; entertaining in supper clubs and night spots such as Maxim’s on the French Riviera, the Copa and the Holiday House in Pittsburgh, the Hawaiian Cottage in Camden, and several others throughout North America. His travels included brief appearances on and off-Broadway. “Enrico” often remarked that his most memorable singing engagements were those performed for our country’s servicemen and women.

Following his retirement from show business, and after a brief stint as a talent agent and voice coach in New York City, he and his wife Cecylia opened a bar and grill on New York’s Lower East Side. With the birth of their two children, Elizabeth and Robert, the family moved to Manchester to reestablish roots. There, Robert served as the Director of Management for the Manchester Housing Authority for almost 20 years. Robert had an affiliation and close friendship with Ted Herbert, of the famed Ted Herbert Music Mart. He served on the N.H. Commission for the Arts under Governor Meldrim Thomson and was part of the team who selected the New Hampshire state song. He participated in the Miss New Hampshire Scholarship Pageant, coaching vocalists and serving as a featured performer.

An active member of the N.H. Republican party, Thibault was part of the leadership team who welcomed the 1972 Richard Nixon Presidential campaign to Manchester. He also sang at events for Presidents Ronald Reagan and Sen. Robert Dole, during their respective Presidential campaigns in the 1980s. An unsuccessful run for Alderman of Manchester's Ward 11 in the early 1970s led to a renewed involvement in children's and other charitable causes. He began a lengthy association with St. Peter's Orphanage and St. Jean the Baptist Church, managing various charitable events on their behalf. His work also included the co-founding of Manchester's Queen City Ski Club with his brother, Alderman Henry Thibault.

Bob became a prominent figure at Manchester's West Little League, serving as President circa 1973 and began a coaching legacy that spanned decades, while also providing private pitching and hitting lessons to students of all skill levels. He played for and managed local men's teams, including a regional College All-Star baseball team. Later, Bob was petitioned to rejuvenate the Jutras Post American Legion baseball team — one he helped reorganize and manage, beginning in 1980. Bob's coaching years were some of the most fulfilling of his life. Many of his players remained close to him until his death. His close friendship with local and nationally syndicated sportswriter Leo Cloutier gave Thibault the opportunity to manage the Manchester Union Leader Annual Baseball Dinner, which, at that time, was the most prodigious privately-run baseball dinner in the country.

Following a series of health issues, Robert, with his wife Cecylia, retired to Hernando, Fla., Bob played golf and table tennis, remaining most active as a long-time member of the Citrus Hills pickleball team. He coached and played almost daily until Parkinson's disease weakened him to a prohibitive extent. In 2018, Robert and Cecylia moved to Atlanta to live with their son and his family.

Robert is predeceased by his sister Rose Lamberti, brothers Raymond Thibault, Gerard Thibault (who died at two years of age), Roger Thibault (stillborn), Gerard Thibault, and Henri Thibault. He is survived by his wife, Cecylia Thibault, his daughter and son-in-law, Elizabeth and Scott Beaton, their children, Nicholas, Rachel, Marissa, and Catherine Beaton, his son and daughter-in-law, Robert and Camilla Thibault, their children, Maria and Emily Thibault, along with step-siblings, Roger, Raymond and Helen Laferriere, and numerous sisters and brothers-in-law, nieces and nephews.

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