

Frank Maidenberg

Posted: Monday, April 23, 2012 4:00 am

Frank Maidenberg, son of immigrant parents, community leader and visionary, and sunny inspiration to family and friends, died April 21, 2012 at age 97.

Frank was born in Marion on Nov. 2, 1914, the youngest of four sons. His parents David and Rose, who spoke Yiddish, came to this country in 1906. They had left what is now Ukraine but was then the Czarist Empire of Russia.

They first settled in Philadelphia, then set out for greener pastures in the Midwest. According to family lore, after arriving in Indiana by train with three small boys, they realized they had been bound for Marion, Ohio, but had somehow missed the stop. Undaunted, they went on to open the Indiana Dry Goods store in Gas City where as a child Frank gained his first exposure to the business world.

He graduated from Marion High School in 1933 during the Depression. There was no money for college, so he and a few friends traveled door to door throughout Indiana and Ohio selling kitchenware: "32 pieces for 94 cents," he would fondly recall. Eventually this enterprise evolved into a successful restaurant supply business, National China & Equipment Corp., owned by Frank and two of his brothers, Milton and Meyer. It was headquartered on Fourth Street in downtown Marion. (Another brother, Ben, became a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and publisher of the Akron Beacon Journal in Ohio.)

In 1941 Frank married the younger girl next door: Nanette Zimmerman. She had, Frank noticed, grown from a gangly string bean into an attractive young woman.

After two and a half years with the Army during World War II where he served in Morocco, Tunisia and Italy, Capt. Maidenberg returned to his home town, the recipient of a Bronze Star. In a 1985 Chronicle- Tribune article, he said, "When I was in high school, I wanted to leave Marion and never come back. Then I saw the rest of the world, compliments of Uncle Sam, and decided Marion wasn't so bad after all."

As his business and civic interests grew Frank found he had a knack for recognizing unrealized potential. In 1962 he purchased an abandoned ketchup factory on Marion's southeast side and developed the site into Warehouse City, a 20-building complex still providing warehousing and light manufacturing space for area businesses. With partners he opened a Holiday Inn in Marion, and acquired and managed a variety of other commercial real estate ventures.

He described himself as an entrepreneur "not afraid to take a chance or to make a mistake." He

liked to say that he learned far more from his mistakes than his successes.

Frank was a consummate optimist—and a visionary. “During one of our talks in the 1960s,” shared Alan Miller in another Chronicle-Tribune article, “Maidenberg produced a drawing of a paved path along the Mississinewa River where people could walk and ride bicycles—decades before the Riverwalk became a reality. Another dream was a park on East Third Street that would serve as an eastern gateway to Marion. At the time, people driving in were greeted by a junkyard and a neighborhood of substandard houses. Maidenberg lived to see both of those dreams, and many others, come true.” Later he spent years working to attract a multiplex theater to Marion; the movie complex in northwest Marion resulted from his refusal to take no for an answer.

In the late 1960s Frank convinced Mayor Gene O. Moore that Marion needed a housing authority. “People didn’t realize how poor housing was in Marion,” Frank later recalled. “There were people living in houses with no floors and no heat.” Frank agreed to serve as president of the Marion Housing Authority, and served in that position for more than 25 years. Norman Manor and Hilltop Towers were early results of his leadership.

Frank was a charter member of the Mental Health Association and helped found Marion’s first mental health clinic. He worked with others to create the Marion Philharmonic Orchestra; he served with the Grant County Economic Growth Council, the Marion Urban League, the Marion-Grant County Chamber of Commerce, the United Way and many other local organizations. He played a key role for decades as a member of Sinai Temple.

Frank was twice blessed in love. Nanette died in 1980 after 38 years of marriage. In 1981 Frank married Joyce Zuckerman, and the two lived happily for 31 years, blending two loving families.

Frank spent many happy hours in his vegetable garden and greenhouse. He was always amazed that something as fine as an Indiana tomato started life as a tiny seed; indeed, helping miracles develop from small beginnings underscored his approach to business and to life.

Surviving are Joyce, Frank’s wife; three children: Anthony (Jennifer), David, and Jill (Richard Thal); daughter-in-law Patricia Furlong; stepsons Mark Zuckerman (Kathryn Michaels) and David Zuckerman (Barbara Selemon); and 10 grandchildren. Also surviving is business partner and esteemed family friend Judy Fitzgerald. Frank will be buried Tuesday in a family ceremony. Family and friends will also gather later to honor and remember him.

Memorials may be sent to the Frank Maidenberg Educational Fund, c/o Community Foundation of Grant County, 505 W. 3rd St., Marion, IN 46952, or the Sinai Temple Endowment Fund, P.O. Box 1191, Marion, IN 46952.

Raven-Choate Funeral Home, 1202 Kem Road, Marion, handled the arrangements.

Online condolences may be made at www.ravenchoate.com.