

OBITUARIES

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Russell J. Barbera, 82, retired postal union president, served in Army National Guard

By DALE ANDERSON

NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Russell J. Barbera, of the Town of Tonawanda, a retired postal worker and postal union president, died Tuesday in Kenmore Mercy Hospital after a short illness. He was 82.

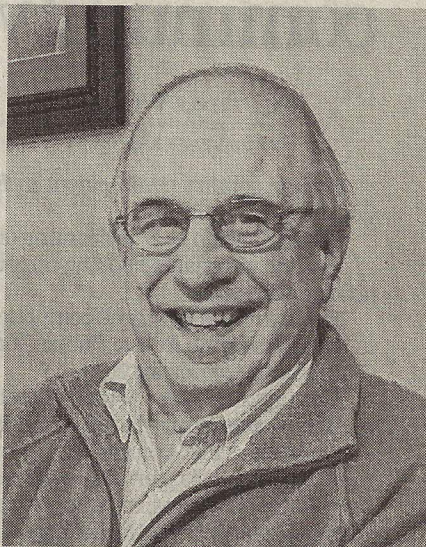
Born in Buffalo, he grew up on the West Side, attended Holy Angels School and was a 1953 graduate of Bishop Fallon High School, where he was an All High athlete, a standout baseball player, basketball player and quarterback on the football team.

A right-handed pitcher, he went to spring training with the Abilene Blue Sox in Texas in 1954 and was invited to try out with the Washington Senators.

"He made a decision at that point that he wouldn't go for it because he figured he wouldn't make the major leagues," said his son, Russell L. Barbera, assignment manager at WIVB-TV.

Mr. Barbera worked on highway construction projects. He began dating Angeline Canzoneri, a Buffalo native whom he had met at movies at the old Circle Theater on Connecticut Street and at teen functions in the social hall above the theater. The couple were married on May 16, 1959.

Mr. Barbera joined the Army National Guard in 1958 and served for eight years.



In 1959, he began working for the U.S. Postal Service as a letter carrier at the Bidwell Station. He became a union steward and helped negotiate the first union contract for local postal workers in the early 1970s.

"I was a union wife," his wife, Angeline Barbera, said, "and I was a union daughter. My father was a vice president in the United Auto Workers. I knew it would involve some sacrifices.

"One time he was offered a job in

management at the post office – he would have made twice the money – but he refused it. That's how much he was involved as a union person."

Mr. Barbera went on to be health benefits representative with Branch 3 of the National Association of Letter Carriers, served for six years as vice president, then became president in 1981, representing more than 1,500 members.

He retired in 1991 and recently was named president emeritus.

"He saved a lot of people's jobs," his son Russell said. "He literally wrote many of their bylaws. After he retired, he kept on with the bylaw committee and other committees."

A longtime Riverside resident, Mr. Barbera coached and managed youth baseball teams.

"He was a tough coach," his wife said, recalling how he dressed down the father of one of his players who kept shouting during a game. "He tried to teach the kids to be fair and not worry about making mistakes."

He was an avid Bills and Dodgers fan.

In addition to his wife and son, survivors include two other sons, Joseph and Louis; a daughter, Frances; seven grandchildren; and four great-grandchildren.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be offered at 1:30 p.m. today in St. Margaret Catholic Church, 1395 Hertel Ave.