



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Jack M. Martins

From the Desk of Senator Jack M. Martins

JACK M. MARTINS December 18, 2014

Where have all the George Baileys gone?

I've always loved this time of year. The holidays hold an awful lot of magic and memories for me. Virtually everything, from watching old black and white movies (I can't watch them colorized!) to untangling impossible clusters of Christmas lights, possesses the astonishing ability to charge up my ol' Christmas spirit. But as a state senator, there doesn't seem to be a whole lot of free time for much of that these days. While I savor being part of our community celebrations, there are days that the grittier, everyday business of state politics sucks that joy right out of me. It's a challenge not to become jaded and as each of us deals with the push and pull of the holiday rush, I'm sure I'm not alone. That's what this column is about.

When I started writing it last week, all of my themes were geared toward exposing some recent political boondoggle or another. In fact, I couldn't decide which of the many I would touch upon first. While I knew that I usually reserve this week's column for some compelling observations about the spirit of the season, I just wasn't seeing or even feeling it this year.

I tried some Christmas music, driving around to look at lights, and finally stared at our own beautiful Christmas tree into the dark, wee hours of the night. Nothing happened. I even brought out the big guns and watched one of my favorite films, "It's a Wonderful Life," with

hopes it might jolt a more sympathetic Christmas message out of me. Here was the protagonist, George Bailey doing the right things time and again his entire life: saving his brother who fell into a frozen pond, preventing the drunk pharmacist, Mr. Gower from accidentally poisoning someone, taking over his father's Savings and Loan to keep it out of the clutches of the greedy Mr. Potter who wanted to throw people out of their homes. To be sure, the whole movie is an homage to human goodness, the story of a man whose own interests continually take a back seat to his helping others.

Let's be honest. When was the last time Hollywood produced a script about an everyday, self-sacrificing, family man whose only reward was his own sense of gratitude? It left me further discouraged and wondering, "Where have all the George Baileys gone?" Selflessness is truly a rare commodity in today's world and in government some would say it's gone the way of the dinosaur. Can it be that in a world where everything is spun and marketed, integrity and righteousness just no longer have a place?

I dutifully watched until its end— until "an angel gets his wings" – then clicked it off and retired for the night as I had a long day ahead of me.

Early the next morning I set out with my staff to collect some donations for our annual Holiday Toy Drive benefiting children at Winthrop University Hospital. You can probably guess what happened next. We were bowled over by the generosity of treasure, time and spirit that was waiting for us. At numerous locations from Port Washington to Mineola to Herricks we were met by dozens of children, parents and educators eagerly waiting to send more than 2,000 new toys to the kids at Winthrop! When we arrived at the hospital, we dropped off a virtual mountain of toys to children and parents who could not have been more awestruck and thankful.

It became apparent to me that these were much more than playthings for these families. It was confirmation that good, everyday, self-sacrificing people still exist and that they are our neighbors, right here on Long Island. Here were the George Baileys I was seeking, right under my nose the whole time. Here was the spirit of Christmas.

Truth be told, I feel pretty lucky too. As your Senator, you allow me to deliver that Christmas cheer and the hope that comes with it. Then I get the added benefit of soaking in all the goodness that comes as a result of your kindness. So on behalf of all of us who benefit from innumerable acts of kindness and charity, including those children and families who'll be spending their holidays in the hospital, I offer you our sincerest gratitude.

And for those of you whose quiet kindness, like George Bailey's, goes unrecognized or is intentionally anonymous, I especially thank you during this Holiday Season. God bless you, one and all.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and Happy Holidays!