



John Massarella Celebrates 65th Catenian Anniversary

John became a Catenian on 3rd October 1944, joining Doncaster Circle just shy of his 24th birthday and was sponsored by Stanley Pennington, a local solicitor and family friend. During the following 65 years John's Catenian career has seen John move to Wimbledon Circle on 12th July 1966, then to his current home of Epsom Circle on 21st November 1991. John has held posts in all his Circles; he was treasurer in Doncaster for three years then President in 1950, Wimbledon President in 1970, Epsom President in 1998 and Provincial Councillor from 2001 to 2004. John is held in high regard and called friend by all brothers from Epsom and they were very proud to be able to celebrate John's 65th Catenian anniversary at their Ladies and Clergy night in November last year. Grand President elect Vernon de Cruz presented John with a scroll and spoke about John's amazing achievement. John Golden and Peter Pieroni MBE and his wife Anne represented Wimbledon Circle. Doncaster brothers sent their written congratulations and warmest wishes via Epsom's President Ron Vaz.

John Lewis Massarella was born in Bentley just north of Doncaster on 31st October 1920 into a farming family. John's grandfather Giovanni Massarella and his three brothers left their vineyards in Setterfratte, Italy, for a new life in America. However, they arrived in England in 1860 en route to the New World and liked the look of South Yorkshire so much they decided to set down roots in Doncaster.

The family's tremendous work ethic and business acumen saw the family farm flourish. The family became an important part of life in South Yorkshire and Lewis Massarella, John's father became a councillor for his home town of Bentley. While running their mixed dairy and arable farm, the family also built up one of the largest ice cream manufacturers in the North of England and distributed their products throughout Yorkshire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire. John started work on the family's farm at only 16. At the outbreak of war in 1939, John tried to join the RAF, but was turned down as he was classed as a key worker providing food for the country.

It was during the war years that John met his future wife. Diana volunteered as one of the nation's Landgirls and was posted to the neighbouring farm. John

and Diana married on 22nd July 1943 and now have six children, 15 grandchildren and nine great grandchildren. It took over 60 years for Diana's work as a Landgirl to be finally recognised when she was presented with a "Women's Land Army and Timber Corps" medal and commemorative certificate signed by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in July 2008.



Left to right: Standing: Epsom President Ron Vaz, Epsom Provincial Officer Tom Finnegan, Grand President Elect Vernon de Cruz and Provincial President Noel Brownell; Seated Diana and John Massarella

Following the war, the Massarella family re-started the ice cream empire (ice-cream manufacture was suspended during the war years). The ice cream was manufactured and sold by small independent Massarella family businesses. The ice cream was sold directly from ice carts all around the north of England and the Midlands. The independent family businesses were looking to re-equip their operations, and it was John who persuaded them to club together to make a single modern manufacturing plant rather than remain independent. This saw the start of one of the biggest ice cream manufacturers in the North of England.

In 1955 J Lyons Co Ltd were looking to expand its UK operations into the North of England and they took over the Massarella plant. John joined Lyons ice cream division in charge of mobile retail sales, within a year he was general superintendent in charge of the company's central division. Later he became the Sales Manager of the ice cream division. Lyons then merged with Neilson and Eldorado Ice Cream companies and became Lyons Maid Ltd. John was appointed Marketing Director

in 1962 and Managing Director in 1967. It was during this progression through Lyons and Lyons Maid, that John and Diana moved south to Surbiton and for John's home Circle to become Wimbledon in 1966. He remained there for 25 years before John and Diana moved out to Dorking and John chose Epsom Circle as his new home in 1991.

When asked how the Association has changed since 1944, John said that not a lot is that different because the Association was so well set up originally that it has stood the test of time. John believes one of the great benefits of the Association is that you can rely on brothers without question or exception.

Diana was asked how she felt about being a wife of a Catenian and she was very happy for John to be a Catenian, however, she did qualify that by saying John would do what he wants anyway. Both Diana and John laughed at this throw away comment.

John is very humble about his achievements at work, about his family and his long standing membership of the Catenians. But the truth is that he is one of the great ambassadors within our Association. John was one of the first people to welcome me at my first visit as a visiting gentleman some seven years ago, he made this new visitor feel as if we had known each other for many years. He is always willing to share his time and anecdotes with everyone and always leaves a lasting impression. He has a fascinating history, which he is willing to share with brothers and even if they have heard the stories before, they all listen intently and with respect to a great cornerstone of our Circle.

His quiet demeanour hides a brilliant business brain and a generous spirit, his easy style makes him approachable. He is much respected and loved by brothers in Doncaster, Wimbledon and Epsom Circles.

Although John has suffered from health problems in recent months, he never complains, in fact his usual response to the question "How are you John?" is "Not bad for an old codger". This is always reassuring and brings a smile. John still regularly attends our Circle meetings and even attends the Annual Conference each year. Congratulations from Brothers of Epsom, Wimbledon and Doncaster to Brother John Massarella on 65 years as a Catenian. I'll end in John's own words, "Not bad for an old codger".

Kevin Rourke, Epsom Circle