

Maura Hennigan and Vince Petryk

**The politician, the business person
25 years later enjoying their greatest success
And it all started in Jamaica Plain**

By Paul Feeney, *Boston City Paper*

Two of the biggest events in the history of Jamaica Plain both happened about twenty five years ago. One was a political, the other a business event. Politically, it was the start of Maura Hennigan's public service career and commercially it was the opening of JP Licks Ice Cream shop, both in Jamaica Plain.

I was there for both events, and I'm still here today a quarter of a century later when JP Licks is about to receive the 2006 Small Business of the Year award from the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce (Oct. 26) and Maura Hennigan is set to serve the people again as Clerk of the Criminal Court of Suffolk County. (Jan. '07)

She was victorious over Bob Dello Russo, a lifelong resident of the North End, in a hard fought, well earned victory, taking 18 of Boston's 22 wards and racking up unbelievable numbers in her home district of Jamaica Plain, Roslindale and West Roxbury. (See the complete election chart in this issue). Surprisingly, this Irish-Catholic descendant of Cork and Galway was not able to claim victory in South Boston's Wards 6 and 7. Still the final Southie vote was very close with Hennigan losing by only 274 votes. In Jamaica Plain, however, it was Hennigan 5,248 votes to Dello Russo's 1872. JP came through big for Maura, as did Roslindale and West Roxbury in similar fashion.

Vince Petryk continues to amaze me with the popularity of JP Licks. From day one, it took off, skyrocketing to instant fame and success. I'll never forget meeting him for the first and only time, writing about his opening and curious about the people he hired and the people who flocked to his ice cream lovers haven. He told me point blank at the time that he liked me and he liked my paper but that he wasn't going to spend any money advertising in it. Instead, he was going to advertise in the Boston College Heights newspaper because this was his target audience. He felt that he could attract these young 18 to 21 year-olds to his restaurant, and he did. I can remember how everyone looked like punk rockers who seemed to go there. JP was in the midst of a great population change. The Irish were leaving and in their place was a collection of socialists, communists, lesbians, liberal progressives, Cambridge-type intellectuals, yuppies, hippies, as well as many professional people whose first housing preference might have been Cambridge or Brookline but the prices for houses were much better in Jamaica Plain.

It seemed like they all read only the Phoenix weekly newspaper. One thing they all shared in common however was their support for JP Licks and Maura Hennigan. JP Licks, it was easy to understand why but for Maura Hennigan it is amazing to look back and wonder how she was able to gain the support of the new arrivals to JP while still having the support of the old Irish and others who moved out and over to Roslindale and West Roxbury.

It was the biggest political challenge of any Irish politician in the history of Boston, but she did it then and she continues to do it now. Like Mayor Kevin White, in days gone by, her support in this city is across the board. To pick her self up off the ground after losing the mayoral election and to get right back on her feet to become the Clerk of the Criminal Court is an even bigger story than the arrival of Deval Patrick on the political scene. Powerful political forces including John Nucci, Sal DiMasi and Tom Menino were at work behind the scenes to get Dello Russo elected Clerk, but in the end, they couldn't pull it off. And it's because Maura Hennigan has earned the respect and trust of the people. They don't just know her name. They know her and they respect and trust her independence and aloofness from the political power structure. She is truly for the people and not for the establishment. She doesn't support the status quo. She doesn't go along to get along in order to get things done, supposedly.

Today, JP Licks is not just for twenty-somethings. Along the way Vincent Petryk got married and had kids too and as he grew and changed so did his establishment. Today, the JP Licks Ice Cream Cafe in Jamaica Plain is a favorite eating and drinking destination for people of all ages, lifestyles, nationalities, occupations. It is truly the town meeting hall, library, and favorite gathering place for non-alcoholic drink consumption. Dunkin Donuts and Starbucks can take a lesson from this place.

The huge coffee roaster on the premises is a sight to behold, beyond comprehension. Who thought of this idea? The bags of coffee beans all around it. To me it's like the milk bottle outside the children's museum on the waterfront. It's a sight to behold, to come and see, to visit, to stare at, to be near, at or around it. It is an icon, a tourist attraction, almost like the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia, the city from where Vincent Petryk came 25 years or more ago to get into the Ice Cream business and then the coffee business too. And its all inside the old JP Firehouse.

Here at the Boston City Paper, we're fortunate to have Carol O'Connor of West Roxbury and her team of restaurant reviewers to share their opinions on the best places to eat and drink in Greater Boston in their weekly column Tablecritic.com. There is the website also with the same name. On page 6, Meredith Smith offers her comments of the JP Licks of the here and now, the JP Licks, 25 years later. I continue to be impressed at Petryk's ability to change and grow with the times. It was easier for him to move up and out of JP to open other places in nearby communities, including Mission Hill and Chestnut Hill because like Hennigan, he too has the faith and trust of the people – that great reputation that follows him wherever he goes.

Maura Hennigan never had an easy election. But let me ask you, the reader a question. If you had a daughter who wanted to become a politician, would you want her to stop and go no further than the first office she was elected to? Or would you like to see her continue on to other

challenges and to compete for greater voter support and possibly someday become a mayor, a governor, a congressman, US Senator, and even the President of the United States?

Maura Hennigan is the only elected politician in the history of our city to have served on all three modern-day configurations of the Boston City Council. In 1983 she was elected to the then nine member City Council where all members were elected citywide. In 1999, the City Council was changed to be a body consisting of nine district seats and four citywide seats. Maura chose to run for the district seat for West Roxbury, Roslindale and Jamaica Plain and she won again. Then in 2001, she ran for one of the four citywide seats, serving two terms and then giving up a sure seat to run for Mayor in 2005. She gave it her all, but truth be said, she could not topple the powerful, entrenched incumbent.

When John Nucci announced he was not going to seek re-election as Clerk of the Criminal Court, Hennigan decided immediately to seek the post, again not without a difficult challenge from a well supported, well financed opponent. It is this election, this victory that is most significant because it finally demonstrated her across the board appeal to the voters of Boston. Had her opponent not been well financed, not well supported by powerful political interests, it could be said that she might have received an even greater overwhelming show of support from the people, a valid indication of the real support that is out there for her that makes her a political force to be reckoned with in the next quarter of a century.

We salute the two of them. They deserve the success they have achieved. The lives will forever reflect the history of Jamaica Plain and how the times have and will always be a 'ghangin and how all of us must continually deal with that reality in our own lives and the lives of our loved ones. James Michael Curley and your purple shamrocks, move over, you have company now who have also made their mark on Jamaica Plain in their time. Gerry Burke, call in the Doyle's artist. You need to add Petryk's picture to the wall and make a more prominent spot for Hennigan. City Council President Flaherty, can you draw up a resolution to add their names to the foot of the Jamaica Plain Monument? Freddie at Same Old Place Restaurant, don't you think they both deserve a sandwich named in their honor?