**Remarks of Deputy Mayor Vic De Luca**

**October 8, 2022**

**Dedication of the Gerard W. Ryan Plaza at the Maplewood Municipal Building**

Gerard W. Ryan loved Maplewood. He gave his heart and soul to our town and our people.

Born and raised in Staten Island, Jerry moved here in 1985. Six years later, this 30 year old ran for Township Committee but that election was unlike anything before or since.

In November 1991, there were four candidates for two Township Committee seats. Republican Bob Grasmere came in first and Democrat Jerry Ryan was second, beating his Republican rival by four votes. Jerry was certified by Essex County as the winner but there was a legal challenge. After a hearing, the judge agreed there were a series of mistakes and violations of election laws. He voided the election, annulled the certification and removed Jerry from office. The judge ordered a new election.

In that second election, voters came out in droves and Jerry was overwhelming elected to the Township Committee. In 1992, he took the oath of office beginning a total of 19 years on the Township Committee, three of those as Mayor.

He was the youngest person elected to the Township Committee and the youngest Mayor of Maplewood; badges he proudly wore.

Janey and I bought our house here in 1994 and three years later – 25 years ago - I was Jerry’s running mate. I was older but a newbie; Jerry already served six years but was still a kid at heart. Campaigning door-to-door, day-after-day allowed us to create a lasting bond and deepened our shared commitment to public service. There are so many stories from those days campaigning that will not be shared today.

My first vote on the Township Committee was for Gerard W. Ryan as Maplewood’s Mayor. I served with Jerry on the Committee for 13 years and even longer with him on the Planning Board. After leaving the Township Committee in 2016, I appointed Jerry to the Planning Board and soon he became Chair, a position he held until his passing.

Jerry made a positive difference in my life and the lives of so many others. I will always remember his welcoming attitude and willingness to tackle any issue for the good of our community. Jerry was a consistent and effective leader in guiding decisions. He was an honest and courageous elected official and we were lucky to have him.

Jerry rarely got angry, believing that people had a right to challenge and criticize their elected leaders. One time though Jerry said “I’ve had it. I’m never going to let anyone walk all over me.” I guess we should have thought about that before putting Jerry’s plaque in the middle of a sidewalk.

Jerry’s last Township Committee meeting was December 15, 2015. I was Mayor but I asked him to preside over the meeting in respect to his years of service. Here is some of what he said:

“It has been a blessing and joy to be given the opportunity to serve my neighbors, the people in the town that I live in. To have the support of your family and your friends and your party to be able to help you do this thing that you love doing — it really can’t be described.”

“The really great thing about this job is that you get to meet every single interesting person in your community. Some people say nasty things about you. Some people say delightful things about you. But you are elected to serve them all.”

Reflecting on his service, Jerry said interacting with people was the best part of the job. He said he was proud of his role in fostering transparency and inclusion.

Jerry and I talked a lot about a One Maplewood approach to governing and delivering public services. Said Jerry at his last TC meeting: “I’m proud that we talk about how we are serving one Maplewood. Not one little neighborhood, not one little enclave, not one little group. But the entire town. That wasn’t always true. But it is now.”

Today people from across our great community have joined together to dedicate this plaza to our friend and our colleague, Jerry Ryan. No better person could have been selected for this honor. The building behind me is where Jerry made a real difference and so this grand plaza and entrance will bear his name forevermore.

Today we celebrate the life of Jerry Ryan. We miss you but will always remember your smile, your intelligence, your dedication and your service to the public.