

'All the Way With JFK'

Reliving Campaign '60

By Joseph P. Mastrangelo

The main ballroom of the Mayflower Hotel was warm with handshakes and memories Saturday night as the pros of John Fitzgerald Kennedy's campaign got together to eat, drink and tell stories.

The reunion was the idea of Francis X. Dooley, then assistant to the Democratic National Committee chairman and now a lobbyist. Dooley used the old bumper sticker, "All the Way With JFK and LBJ," as a design for the invitation.

"A few of us realized that the only time we saw each other was at wakes and funerals, so why not a party?" Dooley said.

The guests came in from all over the country, holding back, a little shy at first as they searched for familiar faces from the '60 campaign.

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Former Ohio gov. Michael DeSalle, left, Larry O'Brien, by John McDonnell.

Washington Post Dec. 4, 1978

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1960

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Although the smoke-filled rooms may be a thing of the past for many of the 200 who were there, to listen to them reminisce, the '60s could have been only a few days ago. Some rattled off the votes they brought in, others admitted they've never been the same since the assassination 15 years ago.

Two bars were open, there was a large buffet in the center of the hall and the music was a mixture of the old and new. But the politicians — most of them in their 60s — would rather talk, so there was a lot of room on the dance floor.

Larry O'Brien, postmaster general at the time of the Kennedy assassination, went all the way back to Kennedy's run for the Senate in 1952. "I'm in good shape," said O'Brien about his job now as NBA commissioner. "All I'm suffering from is a crick in the neck from looking up at tall basketball players."

John Graves, now with the Department of Agriculture, remembered campaigning for Kennedy in Kansas and Pennsylvania. Graves wore his original PT-boat tie clasp and a narrow tie dating back to the '60s.

"There were a lot of tie clasp made up in those days, but not many had the little '60 down in the corner," he said.

"These were authentic; the others we used when we would shake someone's hand and say, 'Jack gave this to me, and I want you to have it.'"

The Kansas campaign was tough and Graves told of one incident when then-Gov. George Docking would not allow Kennedy's picture to be hung.

"It was at the state fair in the Democratic party booth. The governor was sore at Kennedy and would not let us hang his picture. I called Washington and they told me to get out of Kansas. Anyway, we took two counties."

Bill McGlooin, now with the government, talked about the black cam-

paigned contingent. "We had Joe Woolcott, Hank Aaron, Mrs. Willie Mays and Henry Armstrong, who used to say, 'I want you to vote for Sen. Kennedy because Adam Clayton Powell says so.'"

Again and again the conversation went back to the tragedy in Dallas. "I was at the Touchdown Club when I heard about it," said McGlooin. "I felt like the hat-check boy at the last supper."

Jerry Bruno left his job as an organizer for the UAW in 1960 to work for Kennedy. "I wanted a little bit of glory," Bruno said. "The UAW came out for Hubert, so I worked Minnesota for Kennedy and beat them in their own back yard. I was proud to be with a guy who motivated the country."

Bruno, who was the advance man in Dallas, said, "I set the whole trip up, San Antonio, Houston, Ft. Worth and Dallas."

Millie Jeffries, a UAW official in 1960 and now president of the National Woman's Political Caucus, came in from Michigan for the event. "I was a supporter a long time before I could tell anyone," she said. "Of course we had (favorite son) Mennen Williams for governor at the time."

One of the old Irish precinct workers for Kennedy, Jimmy Collins, 73, sat on a step beside the dance floor watching a few couples jitterbugging to Glenn Miller's "In the Mood."

Collins, a former chief deputy sheriff from Suffolk County, Mass., and an early Kennedy man, said, "He made everyone feel younger. He took everybody into his campaign. It was good for the older people. When you retire you have to be around young people."

The most popular greeting of the evening was, "Ready to saddle up for another campaign?" Most looked fit enough to put together another campaign, if they saw a good candidate.

Reunions are only yesterdays, but at the end of the evening no one wanted to go away.