

# Benefit celebrates a life



Lisa Massaro Martone seemed to touch the lives of many people she came in contact with at the Branford Post Office. Submitted photo.

By Lisa Reisman  
Special to the Times

4/13/12  
**H**ow do you measure a life, especially one that, at first glance, doesn't begin to approach its extraordinary impact? That was the life of Lisa Massaro Martone who died in late January at the age of 46.

She was raised in an East Haven household where rules were followed and Sunday dinner was Sunday dinner. Her father worked at the post office, her mother at various jobs, instilling in her and her older brother the

values of hard work and honesty.

At Sacred Heart Academy, she was a good student with a close-knit group of friends, the girl with the perfectly layered hair and giant blue eyes that had boys swooning over her.

She worked as a window clerk at the Branford post office for 24 years. She married the man who grew up five houses away from her. They named their baby Alex.

But these biographical facts barely scratch the surface of who Lisa Martone Massaro was, of

whose lives she brightened. It's to honor Lisa and for her 6-year-old son that her friends and family are holding a benefit this Monday night at Eli's on the Hill in Branford.

Consider this. When she succumbed to ovarian cancer, over 1,000 people attended her wake, waiting an hour and a half to pay their respects to Lisa's family. Among them was Paul LaVazza, the retired Branford postmaster and Lisa's boss for 18 years. He and his wife drove the 725 miles from

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their home in South Carolina. The ride took 14 hours.

It was LaVazza who, because Lisa didn't like to drive in nasty weather, would pick her up at her East Haven home and take her to work whenever it snowed. "She was so valuable to me," he said in a recent telephone interview. "She had an integrity to her that people respected, a way of dealing with customers who were tough to deal with," and invariably they'd leave with smiles on their face.

Her longtime co-worker Bob Komar agreed. "She added that extra little touch, asking people how they were doing, how their families were doing," he said. "She was so genuine that she could relate to anyone. I think people sometimes would come in just to see her."

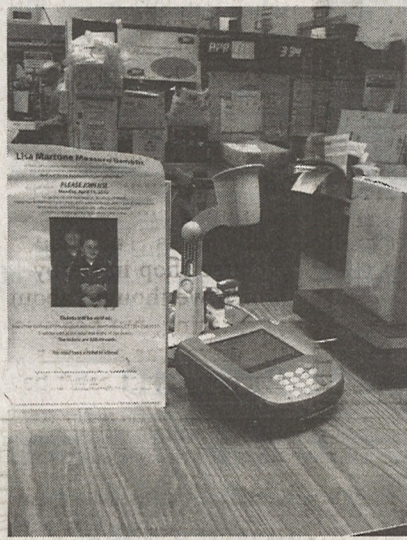
That's what inspired Carol Cornachini, owner of Branford's Shoetique, to "keep Lisa's son in shoes" until her store runs out of sizes that fit him. "She made you feel happy to be around her," said Cornachini, who was sending a package at the main post office on a recent afternoon. "She just lit up the counter."

It wasn't only her co-workers and customers that Lisa Martone Massaro touched. Her brother Jimmy recalled her mentioning to him that she had attended a party for someone who was retiring from United Illuminating. Despite knowing no one there, she had a great time, she told her brother. Not long after her funeral, Jimmy got a message on his Facebook page from someone down south. "I met your sister at my retirement dinner and

I can't believe the effect she's had on my life," he wrote.

Apparently this was no isolated event. "Lisa never met a stranger," said childhood friend Margaret Hallinan.

Surely she was too good to be true, this



The station at the main Branford post office that Lisa Martone Massaro occupied for 24 years. Lisa Reisman photo.

daughter who made it a practice of calling her parents every morning and evening just to check up on them, this friend who had a special nickname for every one of her countless friends,

this person who had the gift of finding the good in anyone, as her best friend Lisa Acerra recalled, and of making everyone feel better, no matter how bleak the circumstances, as she did during her chemotherapy treatments. She renamed them "chemo parties" and joked around with Sacred Heart sidekicks Hallinan and Maria Fradiani.

Maybe that's why so many people call Lisa their best friend, the same people who still hear Lisa's laugh that made everyone laugh, who still feel the glorious warmth of her smile, and the goodness and generosity of spirit that glowed through her. And why all those best friends say they see Lisa's eyes every time they look up at the sky on a lovely day.

It's also why, in her last months, she was far more concerned about her parents, her hus-

band, her brother, and her friends, than herself; why she pushed herself to be brave and strong for everyone else. "There was nothing self-centered in her suffering," said Sister Mariette Moan of Sacred Heart, who visited her regularly at home and at the hospital.

With one exception: her 6-year-old son Alex. She worried he would forget her. "Whenever you look up at the moon, Mommy will be smiling down on you," one of her friends overheard her telling her son.

That's why Maria Fradiani has resolved, each time little Alex turns a certain age, to show him a picture of Lisa at the same age. And why her friends and family on Monday night will not only be celebrating her life but, in keeping with

her wishes, looking out for Alex's future.

So maybe it's as simple as this. To measure the life of Lisa Martone Massaro, just ask anyone who ever knew her, even for a short time. It'll be worth it.

Lisa Martone Massaro Benefit takes place Monday, April 16, 7-11 p.m., Eli's on the Hill, 624 West Main Street, Branford 203-488-2700. For tickets, Lisa's Hair Gallery, 83 Washington Avenue, North Haven 203-234-7722 and at the door. Donations may be made to the Alexander

J. Massaro Fund, c/o Citizens Band, 430 Foxon Road, Route 80, East Haven, CT 06513.



Lisa Martone Massaro with her son Alex.