

# 'Unk' DaRos mines history of Stony Creek Quarry at talk

By Lisa Reisman

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BRANFORD — When Anthony “Unk” DaRos was growing up in Stony Creek in the 1940s and 1950s, his playground had no jungle gym, no slide, no swing.

But there were rocky ledges to scale and buildings to explore — the blacksmith’s shop, the drafting building, and the finishing shed, to name a few — and abandoned train tracks for foot races. And there was the quarry hole, where he and his friends drank the water, which was pure.

“That was when the quarry was shut down,” DaRos, 79, said at a recent talk at the Stony Creek Quarry sponsored by Shoreline Village, a non-profit organization

which aims to help Shoreline seniors live in their own homes.

DaRos, the former first selectman of Branford, was referring to the labor strike that forced Dodd’s Granite Co. to close its operations in 1933. The place stayed quiet until 1956 when Castellucci & Sons from Rhode Island bought it, he said.

“When they did the lockout, the workers left everything, even their lunchpails were still there,” DaRos told a group of 20 dwarfed by the massive cliffs of pink granite on the 450-acre town-owned preserve. “There were tools on the work benches. They couldn’t get back in.”

DaRos, who would go on to

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work at the quarry during winters, said his Italian ancestors were just one of various waves of immigrants — from Ireland, Scotland, and Scandinavia, to Spain, Portugal, and Germany — who came to Stony Creek through the 1800s.

“My great grandfather first landed at Saunderson, R.I., in 1890 and then moved down here,” he said.

He showed a photo of a boardinghouse run by his grandmother.

“That building was 150 feet long and three stories high, and it housed 47 workers,” he said.

“My grandmother did the laundry and cooked three hot meals a day on a big eight-burner wood-

burning stove,” he said.

“She prepared lunches and dinners for the quarrymen to whatever their tastes were, and that was a lot because they were from all over.”

His father was a blacksmith helper, known as a nipper.

“They’d have to carry these long drill steels on their shoulders to the workers, and to stop it from bouncing, they’d give a quarter turn on the pole every time they took a step, and it wouldn’t bounce,” he said.

Some of the dangers, it seems, weren’t avoidable.

“A lot of men died in the quarry,” DaRos said. “Some were killed with dynamite. Some were killed in train accidents or crushed by a stone.”

The most pitiless work, it seems, was with a surfacing machine.



Lisa Reisman / Hearst Connecticut Media

## Unk DaRos at Stony Creek Quarry at a recent talk sponsored by Shoreline Village.

“There was a tremendous amount of dust involved, and a lot of my neighbors when I was a kid were down there and they’d always be short of breath but when they started bleeding, they made their arrangements, because it was silicosis and it wasn’t

long that they were going to be around.”

There was no OSHA requiring masks or safety glasses. In fact, DaRos said, the Labor Department was a big part of the problem.

“They would come to these quarry owners and tell them their men

shouldn’t be out in the elements,” he said. “They said ‘you gotta put them inside’ because they thought it was more humane and that was the beginning of the end.”

The owner of Beattie’s Quarry in Guilford, he said, “refused to put his men under cover and his men lived a long time compared to the men that worked here.”

That said, “this quarry was really something in its day,” DaRos said.

“This operation was a whole operation. They designed projects, they fabricated the stone, and they did intricate carving, right here. It wasn’t an easy life, but once it got into your blood, it stayed there.”

Part of the reason, it seems, was the unique nature of the pink granite.

“There’s only one other place in the world that it

exists and that’s in the mountains in Morocco,” he said. “We were actually joined before the plates moved apart, that was 275 million years ago, and then it broke and part of it went to Morocco and the rest stayed here.”

The monument work, he said, “was always the bread and butter because this quarry was one of the few in the world where you can get massive blocks out that are flawless,” says DaRos. “They don’t have cracks in them, they don’t have seams in them, it’s just one very big piece.”

That’s why it’s everywhere, from the base of the Statue of Liberty to Grand Central Terminal to Grant’s Tomb, to supporting the George Washington Bridge, to Boston’s South Station and the Commerce Building in Washington, D.C.