Robert M. Curtis, 96 - WestportNow.com - Westport, Connecticut... Page 1 of 3

Obituaries

MONDAY, DECEMBER 01, 2014

Robert M. Curtis, 96

Robert (Bob) Miles Curtis of Westport died Nov. 20 at Norwalk Hospital. He was 96.

Born April 9, 1918 in Nova Scotia, he was the son of Claude Curtis and Claire John. After his mother died in the flu epidemic of 1918-19, his Aunt Helen moved in to care for him and his sister Margaret.

The family moved frequently. He attended elementary school in Fall River, Mass., and began high school in Olympia, Wash., where he fell in love with sailing. He graduated from Phillips Exeter Academy and Williams College.

He played trumpet with the Purple Knights, a Williams College jazz ensemble, and in 1938 they were hired to play on the French luxury liner SS Normandie as it made its 100th Atlantic crossing.

He participated in an experimental five-year cooperative program that resulted in both a bachelor's degree from Williams (class of '41) and a degree in mechanical engineering from MIT (class of '42).

Due to the U.S. entry into World War II, he graduated from MIT early and entered the Navy, where he began his career as an aeronautical engineer.

While stationed at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, he met and married Eleanor (Benno) Johnson. He then began work at Piasecki Helicopter Corp. in Philadelphia and started a family.

A few years later, he went to work for Igor Sikorsky at Sikorsky Aircraft in Stratford, and moved to Westport, where he lived for the rest of his life.
The move to Connecticut allowed him to rekindle his love of sailing. He joined Cedar Point Yacht Club in Westport, which became an important part of his life.

Bob and Benno were instrumental in executing Cedar Point’s 1966 move from the Compo Beach Marina to Bluff Point in Saugatuck Shores, its current home.

His expertise in offshore navigation made him a much sought after crewman on sailing yachts, for races to Bermuda and Nova Scotia, as well as for cruises in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean.

At times he sailed his own boat, at other times he crewed on small frostbiting boats. Most recently he served on the CPYC Committee Boat, handling and hoisting the race flags.

He was a lifetime member of the Saugatuck River Power Squadron. He earned every educational achievement they offered and went on to teach many of the classes. He served as SRPS commander in the late 1960s, and the Power Squadron always remained an important part of his life.

He was a member of the Y’s Men of Westport Weston, and even after their hikes and other activities became too challenging, he enjoyed going to their weekly talks and luncheons.

In recent years, he most especially enjoyed his association with the “High Tide Club,” an informal but dedicated group of beachgoers who, weather permitting, go swimming in Long Island Sound every day at high tide.

He was predeceased by his wife, Benno, in 1990, and also in 2012 by Kaye McIntosh, his companion of more than 20 years. He is survived by his children Robert, John, and Claire, and by his grandchildren Alexander, Charlotte, Heather, and Leanne. He is also mourned by Kaye’s daughter Jen and granddaughter Hannah, and by numerous nephews and nieces.

A memorial service will be held in the spring.

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