

Bobby Komar, fixture at post office to be honored at memorial

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BRANFORD » How do you measure a life, one quietly lived, one that, at first glance, doesn't begin to approach its sheer impact on so many people?

That was the life of Bobby Komar, the beloved window clerk at Branford's main post office who died in late May at 64. It's to honor him that his co-workers and friends will hold a memorial on Saturday, Sept. 24 at the Park Place branch where he was a fixture for almost 32 years.

He was born in Bridgeport, the son of a homemaker and machin-

ist. He served in the Army as an MP at West Point, where he was a standout baseball player before a knee injury ended his professional aspirations. He settled in East Haven. He was a loyal fan of the Oakland Raiders and the UConn basketball teams.

He worked for the U.S. Postal Service in Branford since 1984.

Of course, these biographical facts, particularly the last one, barely scratch the surface of who Bobby Komar was, of whose lives he brightened.

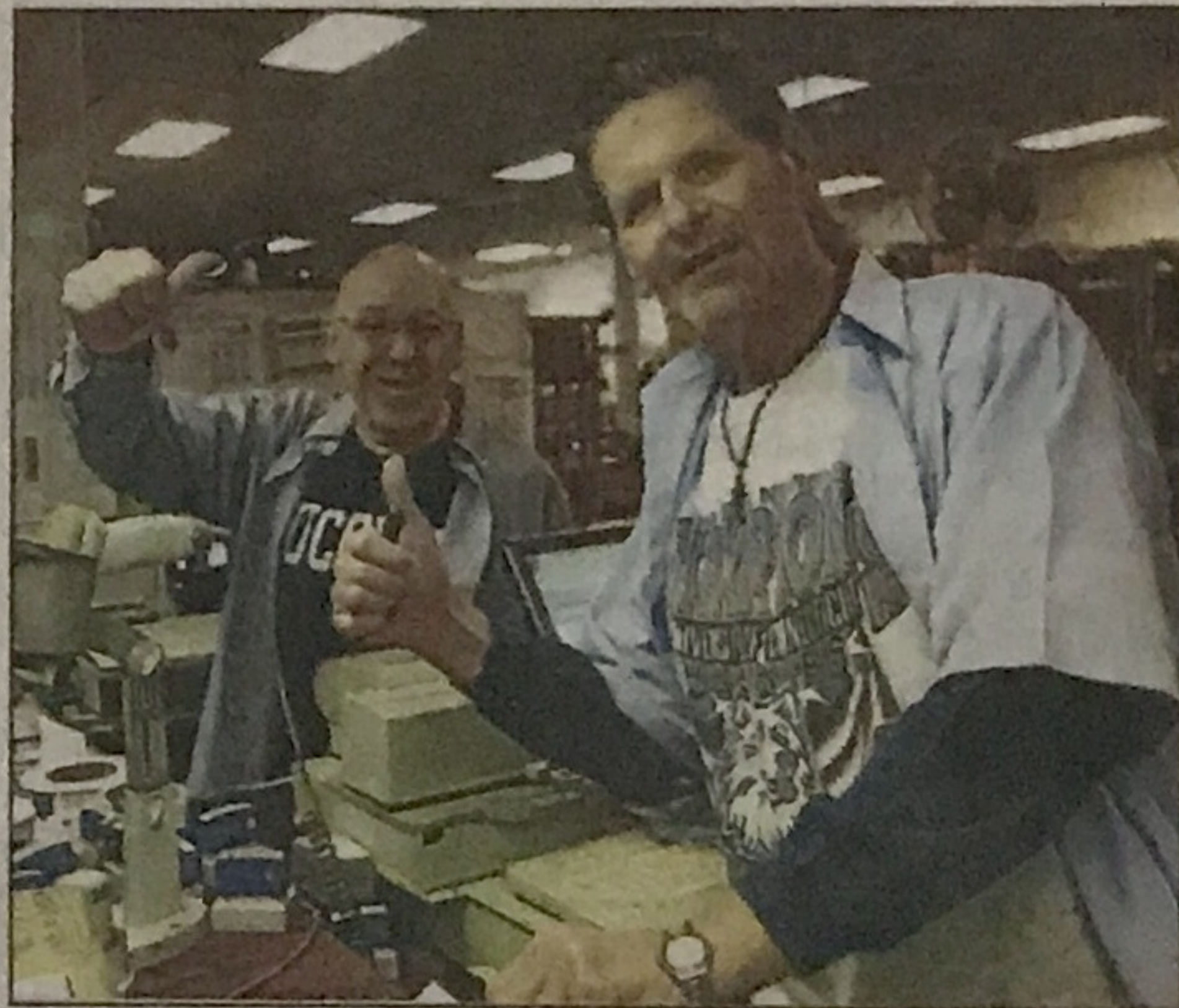
Consider how co-worker and friend David Keyes described him. "He had this gift of always making everything seem better.

Always."

To take one example: the tradition he started of blasting "Reveille" from the intercom at the main post office in Branford each Saturday morning. Then came the exhortation to "RISE AND SHINE," followed, according to fellow window clerk Kathy "Murph" Kessler, by the crew of postal workers whooping and hollering.

And another. When the line to the window stretched into the lobby and impatience was thick in the air, "Bobby would cut the tension with a joke and get everyone smiling," Kessler said.

KOMAR » PAGE 4



Komar with longtime friend and fellow window clerk Bruce Deegan in 2014.

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Komar

FROM PAGE 1

Not only that. "Anytime a little kid came in, he'd give them coloring books and stickers and let them sit on the counter," Park Place window clerk Chris Vece recalled. Somehow, improbably, "he made a federal post office a happy place to be," added maintenance supervisor Benny Fronte.

Then there was his legendary generosity. "He wouldn't let anyone pay for lunch, drinks, anything," said Linda Tondalo, who worked with Komar for almost 30 years. "I got you," he'd say, if anyone was going out for coffee," Officer in Charge Michelle Longobardo recalled.

He went out of his way to help customers as well. When Roseann Baroncini of Branford Book & Card needed stamps, he walked them up to her. When Connecticut Hospice Director of Development Linda Laucella needed help cutting costs on bulk mail, he sat down with them and "went through with us step by step what we had to do," she said.

That demonstration of kindness wasn't anything new. Co-worker Keyes remembered seeing a Shoreline Foods truck pull up in his driveway after a death in his family in the 1990s. It was a week's supply of food from Bobby Komar. "I figured you wouldn't have time to cook," he told his friend.

It didn't end there, according to Keyes. Each Valentine's Day, "he'd come in with about a dozen bouquets of roses and he'd hand them out to female carriers, clerks — even customers — and we'd tell him he was making us all look bad," he said with a laugh. "Same with birthdays," he added. "He never forgot a birthday."

The convivial nature that captured customers and co-workers alike—"anytime there was a party with Bobby, you'd make a note to be there," said Short Beach



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Carrier cage at main post office with photo in remembrance of Bobby Komar.

window clerk Mary Stone — perhaps explains the outpouring of feeling since his passing.

"I'm staggered by the amount of emotion people are showing, how much they miss him," said Robert Low, a 22-year Postal Service veteran who's been at Park Place for four months. "Even this week, it's 6 to 10 customers a day."

Vece agreed. "People come in and see his picture on the wall and they don't know he passed and they're pretty shocked."

Even on the road, customers stop carrier Kevin Chopak. "They talk about how kind he was, what a special guy," he said.

Most, it's fair to assume, didn't know the half of what made him special. They don't know about his devotion to his brother Johnny, who has cerebral palsy, how Komar could be found during his breaks on the phone with social service agencies advocating for his brother's care, how he took him home during the holidays and on little excursions, according to co-worker Bruce Deegan.

"His brother had mobility problems but that didn't stop Bobby from taking him places," Deegan said.

Most customers likewise never knew about his struggle with diabetes, and with the peripheral neuropathy that accompanied it, didn't know how often he was in pain.

"When he was hurting, he'd shuffle," said a co-worker, "but you'd never hear him complain. He was always upbeat."

Which is the reason Kessler continues the tradition of "Reveille" on Saturday mornings at Branford's main post office. "There will never be another Bobby," she said.

And why, as Deegan wrote in a poem dedicated to his friend, "you'll be forever stamped on our hearts."

So maybe it's as simple as this. To measure the life of Bobby Komar, just ask anyone who ever knew him, even for a short time. That should say it all.

A memorial in honor of Bobby Komar will be held at 1:30 p.m. in the lobby of the main post office at 35 Park Place, Branford. The event