

A Frank Tribute

Bambino in bronze

Rizzo made larger than life through 1-ton statue

by Mark McDonald

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Frank is walking down the steps looking into the distance and waving, maybe to someone he helped get a job, maybe to a friend.

At 10 feet, 4 inches tall, the 2,000-pound bronze statue unveiled on the steps of the Municipal Services Building yesterday is just about the right size for a man who stood 6 feet, 2 inches tall and dominated the civic landscape for a generation.

Frank L. Rizzo, the two-term mayor, former police commissioner and source of endless controversy, died in July 1991, shortly after winning the Republican nomination for mayor. On a frigid New Year's Day, his family and supporters gathered to honor the man and to see sculptor Zenos Frudakis' \$100,000 monument to Rizzo unveiled.

A rigging company donated a crane and staff to lift a heavy blue covering to reveal the statue. A string band from Broomall serenaded several hundred well-wishers.

Mayor Rendell, who would have faced Rizzo in the 1991 general election had Rizzo lived, said, "It's very fitting and appropriate that it be here in front of the Municipal Services Building. Frank Rizzo believed that government could make a difference. He believed government could change the quality of lives of people."

A portrait of Rizzo hangs in the Mayor's Reception Room in City Hall along with other Philadelphia mayors, but Rendell said the painting did not "catch the spirit and leadership and the dominance and vibrance of Mayor Rizzo. This wonderful piece of art does that and more."



DAVID MAIALETTI/DAILY NEWS

City Councilman Frank Rizzo Jr. (left) smiles broadly after statue of his late father was unveiled at Municipal Services Building

Frudakis appreciated the praise. "I think I tried to get an attitude of a very big, large energy and dynamic qualities," he said. "I wanted to have movement. That's why it's on stairs. It's off the pedestal and among the people."

Rizzo's wife, Carmella, said the statue was perfectly situated in front of the MSB, and she praised Frudakis for a fine work of art.

"I think he did a great job," she said.

Martin Weinberg, Rizzo's city solicitor and a key adviser, said he recalled the St. Patrick's Day parade in 1972 when Rizzo was photographed waving to the multitude. It was that photo that Carmella Rizzo and her son, City Councilman Frank Rizzo, gave Frudakis to pattern his statue.

"It's a wonderful piece of art that captures him very strongly, and the thing I like is when you go by here I think people are going to smile," Weinberg said. "Because Frank touched so many people on a personal level. It was his style and people will look at it and be reminded of something in their lives."

One of those fans was Vince Gregeasavich, a retired refinisher, who came to the unveiling.

"He was one of the finest men that anybody could meet," he said. "And he was never about himself. It was always the city and for the people."

John Ross, a former police officer who lives in Germantown, said, "I'm here because he was a friend of mine and I know his son. Mayor Rizzo was the kind of man who would see you. If your kid needed a summer job, he'd do it." ■