

**The ADVOCATE**

<http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/local/scn-sa-plaza4dec14,0,3121617.story?coll=stam-news-local-headlines>

# Plaza at Stamford's Old Town Hall dedicated in ex-mayor's honor

By Donna Porstner  
Staff Writer

December 14, 2006

STAMFORD -- The newly rebuilt plaza in front of Old Town Hall was dedicated yesterday to former Mayor Louis Clapes, who ushered in a new era for the city as a corporate mecca.

Several large corporations came to Stamford while Clapes was mayor from 1975 to 1983, including Champion International, General Reinsurance Corp. and Singer Corp., and the Stamford Town Center mall opened.

"Lou had a great temperament for the job; a great vision for what the city should and would become," Mayor Dannel Malloy said.

Family and friends of the former mayor, who died in 1990 at age 73, said Old Town Hall is the perfect location to honor Clapes since he worked in the building during the 12 years he served as town clerk and later passed by it every day on his way to the Chat-N-Chew luncheonette across the street, when he became mayor and his office moved to Washington Boulevard.

"There couldn't be a more fitting tribute to my dad," said Rosemary Raffaele, who came from Florida for the ceremony.

Clapes' daughter Louise Wilson of Newtown and his granddaughters Amy Raffaele of Norwalk, Christine Paoletta of Shelton and Alexandra Clapes of Astoria, N.Y., were also on hand for the event organized by city Rep. Robert "Gabe" DeLuca, R-14.

The city put a plaque honoring Clapes in front of Old Town Hall in April 1991. Back then the grand building at Atlantic and Main streets was draped in red, white and blue bunting for the ceremony attended by about 150 people.

Yesterday, city officials officially named the plaza, which was traditionally used for ceremonies and political announcements, the "Louis A. Clapes Plaza" and put a new plaque with Clapes' likeness near the building's front entrance.

Alexandra Clapes said her grandfather, who grew up on the city's West Side, had a newspaper route downtown that took him past Old Town Hall when he was a child and "vowed one day to have an office in that building." Clapes got his wish in 1963 when he was elected town clerk. The Republican held the post for 12 years before beating Democratic incumbent Frederick Lenz for mayor in 1975.

Friends and family recalled how constituents could always find Clapes walking on Atlantic Street about 10:30 a.m. if they needed to get his attention about a problem or issue.

**Avandia**  
rusigitazione mteate

Want to  
**save**  
up to  
**\$30?**

**\$10 off**  
**\$10 off**  
**\$10 off**

\*Subject to eligibility.

Alexandra Clapes recalled how residents could tell her grandfather was coming by his signature whistle.

"Residents learned to listen for Lou's whistling that proceeded him as he walked on his way," she said. "To many, it signaled the mayor was on his way."

U.S. Rep. Christopher Shays, R-Bridgeport, said he remembers Clapes would take care of parking tickets for constituents who brought them to him and complained.

"He would end up paying them himself: That was Lou Clapes," said Shays, a former Stamford resident.

Local historian and friend Don Russell recalled one time Clapes and his wife, Chris, were coming to his house for dinner. Clapes called to say they would be late because he had to remove a dead skunk from a resident's yard.

"He was the people's mayor for sure," Russell said.

The dedication ceremony marked the completion of about \$2.5 million in exterior renovations to Old Town Hall, including a new roof, new windows, new front steps, new antique-look bus stop shelters and a cleaner facade.

The city plans next to restore the interior but has been looking for a rent-paying tenant to occupy the upper floors.

Plans call for keeping the grand staircase in the center and most of the first floor open to the public, most likely as museum space. The upper levels and a portion of the first floor would be rented out to cover operating costs. A modern 2,000-square-foot glass addition is planned for the rear of the building to make room for an elevator and new bathrooms.

The state has contributed \$6.4 million toward the project, which is estimated to cost as much about \$15 million when done.

The Clapes family has the original massive metal plaque that stood outside Old Town Hall for 15 years. Amy Raffaele said she is holding onto it until the family decides what to do with it.

"That's the big question for the family," she said.