

Former Ravens' president remembered for empathy, faith, spirit

David Modell's immense spirit was celebrated Jan. 17 at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore, where Archbishop William E. Lori offered a funeral Mass for the former president of the Baltimore Ravens.

Modell died of lung cancer Jan. 13. He was 55.

He was the son of the late Art and Patricia Modell. His father moved the National Football League franchise from Cleveland to Baltimore in 1996, and his parents gave extensively to local Catholic causes, including the restoration of the basilica.



Baltimore Ravens head coach John Harbaugh and former liner backer Ray Lewis leave the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore following the funeral Mass for David I. Modell Jan. 17. (Kevin J. Parks/CR Staff)

David Modell left his own mark on the region's civic identity, starting with the selection of the team's colors and the hiring of Brian Billick, who coached them to the first of their two Super Bowl championships.

Remembrances were given by his widow, Michel; one of his three sons, Arthur E.; and brother, John, who referenced the empathy and sense of sharing that led Modell to have the Vince Lombardi Trophy taken around the state for fans to see and touch after the Ravens won Super Bowl XXXV in 2001.

✖ "David was the rarest of souls," his brother said. "He discovered that happiness in this world is about what you give it."

Arthur E. Modell mentioned his father's curiosity. An iconoclast, David Modell's friends included Dr. Ben Carson, the presidential cabinet nominee whose letter of condolence was read by Michel Modell.

"I often referred to him as my favorite liberal," Carson wrote. "He asked me to think

deeply about my positions.”

Mourners included former Ravens’ great Ray Lewis; Stephen Bisciotti, who became sole owner of the team in 2004; coach John Harbaugh; general manager Ozzie Newsome; and senior vice president Kevin Bryne, who gave one of the readings.

Archbishop Lori’s homily referenced Modell’s Catholic faith.



Archbishop William E. Lori greets attendees of the funeral Mass of David I. Modell at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore Jan. 17. (Kevin J. Parks/CR Staff)

“I have not known David nearly as long as most of you,” the archbishop said, “but had the privilege of being in David and Michel’s company and the honor of baptizing their twins (Bertie and Fee).

“In the course of time, I came to know what all of you already knew – that he possessed deep faith, deep courage, and even serenity – all of which was tested by fire as he battled cancer for so long a time.

“When I visited him at (Johns) Hopkins, I thought I would console him and I hope I did. But it was David who inspired me by his optimism and by his readiness to look ahead, come what may.”

The archbishop added one final anecdote.

“In one of my last visits with David he showed me a rosary,” the archbishop said. “If memory serves he obtained (it) in Rome last fall. He smiled as he held it up and I blessed it – even though it had already been blessed by the pope himself.

“What a reminder for you and me not to forget to ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to pray for David and to greet him in eternity as his spiritual mother.”

Bishop Denis J. Madden and Father Thomas Malia concelebrated the Mass.

Also see:

Remembering Art Modell, champion of Catholic education

Patricia Modell was a supporter of Catholic causes

