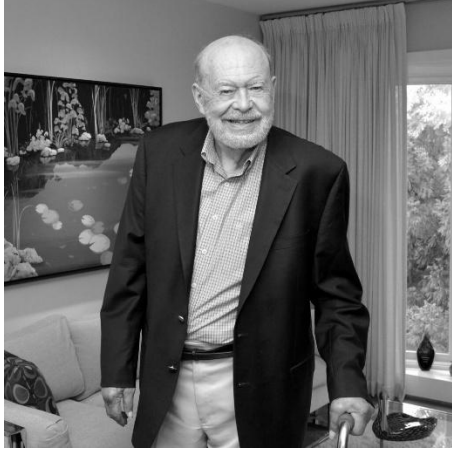


John (Jack) Sullivan Obituary

Living Legend of Alexandria Jack Sullivan Dies at 90

By Mary Wadland, *The Zebra Press*, Alexandria, VA, 17 Aug 2025



A tireless advocate, Sullivan fought for open space, government transparency, and the health of the Potomac.

ALEXANDRIA, VA – John H. “Jack” Sullivan, a longtime civic leader, community advocate, and Living Legend of Alexandria, died on August 16, 2025. He was 90.

The news of Sullivan’s passing was first shared by journalist Rod Kuckro, who wrote on his social media page, “It is with profound sadness that I tell you of the passing earlier today of my dear friend Jack Sullivan. He was a truly selfless servant of the city who served on 11 advisory commissions; was twice president of the

Seminary Hills Association; and was recipient of the Ellen Pickering environmental award in 2022 for his work in spurring cleanup of city sewage discharges into the Potomac River. He was named a Living Legend in 2023.”

Others quickly echoed the sentiment. “Truly a loss for our community,” said Alexandria attorney Barbara Beach. “Jack was a bright, caring man who fought to make the city the best it could be.”

“Jack Sullivan made such a significant and lasting difference in our city and provided critical advice to me as vice mayor and mayor, especially with his crucial input that the city must address all four outfalls,” former Alexandria Mayor Allison Silberberg told *The Zebra* tonight. “I wholeheartedly agreed with him. Against all odds but with his guidance, addressing all four outfalls became the city’s position but it wasn’t easy to achieve. I deeply appreciated his solid input not only on that massive issue but on a whole host of environmental positions not to mention other city policies. I am grateful for his wisdom, guidance, and friendship. Truly an amazing and brilliant person in our city, serving on numerous boards and commissions and getting a well-deserved Ellen Pickering Award and Living Legend Award! I along with many others will miss him for sure. My heart goes out to Paula and John [and Brian] and their whole family.”

Early Life and Education

Born in Toledo, Ohio, Sullivan was raised in a middle-class neighborhood where his father—a dentist and civic activist—taught him the importance of community engagement. “My father was very much a civic activist,” Sullivan once recalled. “I was paying attention to him and what he was doing. I learned from him the difference that one can make in a community.”

He attended parochial schools and went on to serve in the U.S. Air Force Reserve and the Ohio Air National Guard from 1959 to 1965. Sullivan earned both B.A. and M.A. degrees in journalism from Marquette University and a doctorate in international relations and political science from American University, which twice honored him with its Distinguished Alumni Award in 1976 and 1979.

Journalism and Capitol Hill Career

Sullivan began his professional career in journalism in 1959 as a reporter for the *Springfield (Ohio) Sun* and later the *Milwaukee Sentinel*. In 1961, he moved to Washington, D.C., as an aide to Rep. Clement J. Zablocki of Wisconsin. By 1969, he had joined the House Foreign Affairs Committee as a staff consultant, beginning a 20-year tenure on Capitol Hill.

"For a time I was the youngest on the Hill – I was maybe 22 years old," Sullivan once said.

During those years, Sullivan played key roles in major legislative initiatives of the 1970s, including the SALT I arms control treaty, economic aid to Vietnam, implementation of the Sinai Accords, and passage of the War Powers Act. He was named Deputy Chief of Staff of the Committee in 1976.

He also represented the United States abroad: in 1973, as part of the U.S. delegation to the United Nations General Assembly, and in 1976, as a member of the first Congressional staff group to visit China.

USAID and Government Service

In 1977, Sullivan was tapped by the Carter Administration to manage the transition at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). He later led USAID's Bureau for Asia and the Pacific, where he earned the Agency's Superior Honor Award in 1978 for "outstanding leadership in the areas of equal opportunity and affirmative action," particularly for appointing women and minorities to executive positions.

Following his government service, Sullivan built a consulting practice that allowed him more time to devote to civic life in Alexandria.

Alexandria Civic Leadership

For more than 40 years, Sullivan was a cornerstone of Alexandria civic life, serving on 11 city boards and commissions. He twice led the Seminary Hill Association as president and for many years as treasurer, and co-chaired the Alexandria Federation of Civic Associations.

He chaired the Cable Television Commission, where he expanded public access broadcasts to cover Planning Commission meetings and other key sessions, setting a new standard for transparency. He also served on the city's HIV-AIDS Taskforce in the 1980s and chaired the committee that selected Alexandria's first Poet Laureate in 2007.

Sullivan also gave his time to history and preservation, volunteering as a curator and cataloguer for the Stabler-Leadbeater Apothecary Museum and transcribing a Civil War diary for the Alexandria Library.

"I can think of no one else who has made as many exemplary contributions to our community than Jack Sullivan," said **Carter Flemming**, who nominated him as a Living Legend. "For more than 40 years, Jack tirelessly advocated to educate and involve his fellow residents on issues of importance. He has set a high bar for others to follow."

Environmental Legacy

Sullivan considered his greatest legacy to be his environmental work. From 1988 to 1995, he served on the Citizens Advisory Group overseeing the conversion of Cameron Station. While city leaders focused on housing revenue, Sullivan and Col. Ben Brenman fought to preserve open space—efforts that resulted in the creation of Boothe and Brenman parks.

Later, in 2017, Sullivan was appointed to the Combined Sewer System Stakeholder Advisory Group. While the group initially recommended fixing only three of the city's four sewer outfalls, Sullivan insisted the largest—at Oronoco Bay—could not be ignored.

"The major outflow in Old Town was not going to be fixed," he argued. "Every year we were dumping the equivalent of 200 tanks of raw sewage into the Potomac. We were basically only fixing half the problem."

His minority report caught the attention of Virginia State Senator Scott Surovell, who pushed legislation through the state legislature requiring remediation of all four outfalls by 2025.

"For guiding us to the correct decision, we owe Jack Sullivan a huge debt of gratitude," Flemming said. "Future generations of Alexandrians will enjoy a clean and safe Potomac River."

For this achievement, Sullivan was awarded the **Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award in 2022**.



Jack Sullivan (Photo courtesy City of Alexandria)

Recognition as a Living Legend

In 2023, Sullivan was named a Living Legend of Alexandria in recognition of his extraordinary service. "Jack embodied everything a Living Legend stands for—dedication, vision, and a love of community that never wavered," said Mary Wadland, board president of the Living Legends of Alexandria. "His tireless work left an imprint on nearly every corner of Alexandria, from our parks and environment to civic life and government transparency. Jack didn't just serve this city—he inspired all of us to do better. His legacy will continue to guide and uplift Alexandria for generations to come."

Family and Faith

A resident of Alexandria for more than 55 years, Sullivan and his wife, Paula, recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary. He is survived by Paula, their two sons, John and Brian, and one granddaughter. He was an active member of Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic Church in Arlington.

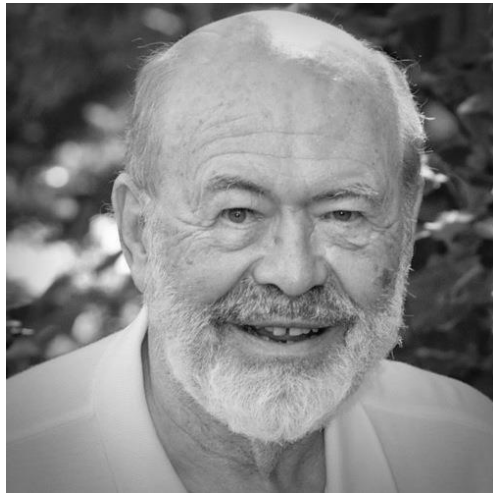
He retired professionally in 2015 at the age of 80.

Looking back, Sullivan once reflected: "I think I have done some positive things. I hope I made a difference over the years."

Details regarding a public service will be forthcoming.

From The Washington Post, Sep. 7, 2025:

John H. "Jack" Sullivan, 90, of Alexandria, Virginia, an international development specialist and civic activist, died at home August 16, 2025, surrounded by family.



Born in Toledo, Ohio, in 1935, he was the son of John E. Sullivan, D.D.S., and Emma (Lay) Sullivan. He served in the U.S. Air Force Reserve and Ohio Air National Guard. He earned bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism from Marquette University (where he met his future wife, Paula) and a doctorate from American University's School of International Service, which twice honored him as a Distinguished Alumnus.

Jack's career began as a journalist in Ohio and Wisconsin before moving to Washington in 1961 as an aide to Rep. Clement Zablocki (D-Wis.). He

joined the House Foreign Affairs Committee in 1969, contributing to initiatives including the SALT I arms control agreement, aid to Southeast Asia, and the War Powers Resolution of 1973. He served with the U.S. delegation to the U.N. General Assembly and was in the first Congressional staff group to visit China. As Assistant Administrator for Asia and the Pacific at USAID, a presidential appointment in the Carter Administration, he led a bureau of 2,800 employees and a \$1.5 billion annual budget, focusing on spreading Green Revolution agriculture and family planning across Asia. He received the Agency's Superior Honor Award for leadership in equal opportunity. After USAID, Jack spent 33 years with two Arlington-based consulting firms and for more than 23 years was an advisor to the government of the Federated States of Micronesia. He retired professionally in 2015 at the age of 80 after having

worked on development issues in some 60 countries.

In 1967, Jack and his young family moved to the City of Alexandria where he became deeply engaged in civic life. Over the decades he served on 11 city boards and commissions—from the Cable Television Commission and the HIV/AIDS Taskforce to the committee that selected the city's first Poet Laureate. He also led community groups as president of the Seminary Hill Association, co-chair of the Federation of Civic Associations, and co-founder of Democrats for a Better Alexandria. Jack played a central role in the transfer of Cameron Station from the U.S. Army to the City of Alexandria, resulting in the creation of Ben Brenman Park. He also advocated for remediation of the combined sewer system, leading to the RiverRenew Tunnel Project, now under construction, which will divert raw sewage from entering the Potomac River. Jack's efforts earned him Alexandria's Ellen Pickering Environmental Excellence Award in 2022 and in 2023 he was named a Living Legend of Alexandria in recognition of his years of public service.

Jack was active in politics from the 1964 Johnson campaign through numerous Alexandria City Council races. He also served on the board of WETA Public Broadcasting and taught courses in political science at the George Washington University and Boston University. For more than 50 years Jack was a member of the "Friday Lunch Group," which meets fortnightly at venues in Maryland and Virginia. Members hail from Capitol Hill, the military, journalism, and academia. He had chaired the group since 2011. A man of many interests, Jack was a collector of vintage American whiskey jugs and bottles and wrote extensively about the whiskey industry of the pre-Prohibition era for collector publications, winning numerous awards. From 2009 until shortly before his death, he maintained two blogs on history and collectibles, posting more than 1,500 articles that have attracted nearly three million views.

Jack is survived by his wife of 62 years, Paula; sons John of Ithaca, NY and Brian of Alexandria, LA; one grandchild, Emma, and six nieces and nephews. A funeral Mass will take place Saturday, September 20, 2025, at 12 noon at Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, 2700 19th Street South, Arlington, VA) followed by a reception to celebrate Jack's life. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to the church's ministry in Medor, Haiti.

To plant trees in memory, please visit the [Sympathy Store](#).