



**A Hospitality Man for the Ages**  
**By Jerry Edwards, CPCE, and former national NACE president**

Vincent DeFinis was not just any catering manager or Director at any old hotel. He was a man with great vision, passion and a non stop motor. I had the privilege of spending time with Vince in his later years of his life at NACE conferences and in regular phone conversations. He would say to me that he wanted to leave something to NACE when he died. He had books to donate and vintage magazines for students to read. What could he do to leave NACE something? I always told him that he had already left us the greatest gift of all. He gave us the gift of a legacy and an identity. That was the bedrock of NACE and he gave that to us.

Before World War II Vincent was a respected Maitre'D who began his service of people in the catering field working for the very wealthiest of people. There he honed his craft of management and staff supervision to become known throughout the northeast as a top Catering Executive.

After the War, the hotel industry began to boom as corporations developed sales teams and the need for meetings and conferences grew. Vince, now a Banquet Manager, was there to embrace that revolution and to serve it. The meeting and convention business was a new phenomenon and directors of catering felt a need to connect to get a handle on how to best service this new area of business. On June 3, 1958 a New York City association for local directors of catering was formed, called The Banquet Managers Guild.

Once again Vince DeFinis was there to help expand and create an identity for this newly formed association called The Banquet Managers Guild. In 1960, Vince worked at The Warwick Hotel in Philadelphia. At the time that he wanted this association to extend to Philadelphia as well. He traveled to New York on a regular basis to attend meetings and garner support for the expansion. After many trips, he was given the confidence to begin a Philadelphia chapter. The success of his own chapter showed the New York members that this concept could be become nationwide and in 1964, The Banquet Managers Guild became a National Association and held its first conference in 1965; where else but in Philadelphia, Vince's home town. That year Vince DeFinis became our first National President.

In 1980, under the guidance and mentorship of past president Vince DeFinis, The Banquet Managers guild became NACE, The National Association of Catering Executives. It had grown from 12 members when Vince first attended that New York meeting in 1960 to over 1000 members across the country.

Vince continued to stick with NACE and attend conferences through 2006 promoting the values of hard work, business ethics and strong morals. At those conferences he would be seen attending meetings and mentoring new leaders. He would inspire young professionals to grow and occasionally he would dance with the young ladies.

I remember a particular conversation in 1998, when I had first become the NACE National President. I was in Las Vegas at the time and Vince happened to be there visiting his daughter. We had dinner together and talked about what it took to lead this association. I was concerned that I had come into this position at a very crucial time and would not handle the upcoming changes as well as I should. We had major management problems and membership growth was at a standstill.

Vince looked me in the eye - of all places, the Voodoo lounge at the top of the Rio. He said “Jerry, you know the right thing to do. Just make sure that whatever decision you and your board make, it is because it is the right thing for NACE, not for any one individual.” That simple statement and the confidence I felt from his reassurances was all I needed to move forward and feel strong about what was about to come.

It takes a very special person to become a mentor. It takes a very special person to give without wanting to receive. It takes a very special person to make you realize that we are strong because one man believed. Vincent DeFinis was that special person.

Vincent, you will be missed, but mostly you will be eternally admired and loved.



Jerry Edwards, CPCE (left), Vince DeFinis, CPCE (center), and Julie Brown-Edwards, CPCE at the NACE Gala in Phoenix, Arizona, July 2006.