



GALLERY OF DISTINGUISHED CITIZENS INDUCTEES 2015

ANTHONY MARINO is the third generation to own and operate the two stores that are located at now 2415 Avenue E in Ensley and 1965 Bessemer Road – the family moved their business to Ensley from Fairfield in 1953. Throughout the years, his family has shown a deep dedication to the neighborhood and the residents they serve. For nearly 100 years Marino’s Market has sought to bring fresh food and groceries to the citizens in the communities west of I-65 in Birmingham.

During the turn of the century, immigrant families like the Marinos moved to Ensley and Fairfield. Unfortunately the period of prosperity came to a close after the U.S. Steel Ensley Works closed in 1976, which, at the height of production, employed roughly 30,000 people. In the years that followed, areas like Ensley saw a steep decline in population.

After the Civil War, Italians, French, German and Irish families settled in the area surrounding Ensley, drawn by the booming promise of industry and prosperity as other municipalities began to spring up along the mineral vein that brought the region to life. In 1907 U.S. Steel acquired TCI – reflecting a nationwide trend of industry consolidation – which led to even more growth in and around Birmingham. Marino’s grandfather immigrated from Sicily, coming through Ellis Island before making his way to Birmingham, drawn by the promise a job in the booming iron industry. However, he spoke little English and was not able to get a job in one of the mills. Instead, he opened a small grocery store with his wife, Mary Bruno.

As UAB history professor Pam King pointed out, the region continues to be tied to the industrial roots. “Now furnaces are overgrown with kudzu and weeds and brush. If you’re in Ensley and you’re downtown and you wonder what happened to this place, it’s really because U.S. Steel closed down their Ensley Works in 1976. It was already experiencing some outflow because of white flight and interstates and suburbanization. Such a huge number of families there were dependent on US Steel.”

In spite of these changes, Marino and his family have continued their effort to feed the families who live in the area. In 2011, Marino asked the council for incentives to be able to expand and modernize his stores. According an article in the *Birmingham News*, “In a [2011] meeting with the Birmingham City Council’s budget and finance committee and the economic development committee, Anthony Marino said the family recently decided it wanted to continue its commitment to the Ensley community by making its grocery stores more modern and preparing the business for the fourth generation of Marino leadership with Anthony’s son, Jay. ‘We want to be able to provide what needs to be provided to the community today,’ Anthony Marino told the committee. ‘We are committed to the neighborhood.’”

Along with the businesses that employ nearly 70 people and are still continuing to grow, Marino has been a dedicated citizen who, for the last ten years, has served as chair for the Party with a Purpose that brings thousands of residents together for fun and festivities while also offering a job fair, a health and wellness center and opportunities to print out resumes, apply for job or even donate blood.

“This is a leisure of love. What we’re doing is letting people know what’s out there and what’s available to them,” Marino said, as he walked through the park during the 2017 Party with a Purpose. “We’ve got things for anyone from one to 100-years-old out here. It’s inspirational in one way and at the same time a heartfelt thank you to the community.”