

Obituary

Streetsville 'renaissance man' will be missed

By JOHN STEWART
Staff



John Emerson

"Any community with a soul has someone like John Emerson," said local author and teacher Tom Urbaniak of the man whose funeral drew hundreds of people to Streetsville United Church on Tuesday.

"John was an historian par excellence — the reigning expert on Streetsville's history and an effective advocate for heritage conservation," said Urbaniak, an assistant professor at Cape Breton University. "He had a civic conscience and a social conscience. He was definitely a leading citizen of Streetsville."

Emerson, 74, died Oct. 14 after a four-year battle with multiple myeloma, a cancer of the blood's plasma cells.

His eldest son Bruce said from the family home on Queen St. S., that, "We always thought of Dad as a renaissance man. He had a huge range of talents and interests."

After teaching English and art in Etobicoke high schools, the Montreal

native was a provincial schools inspector, a program consultant in art and spent 24 years in various capacities at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Education.

A past-president of the Streetsville Historical Society, Emerson and his wife Sandra were the lifeblood of the organization in many ways, said Norman Potts, the current president.

"It is going to be an awful loss to our society," said Potts who explained that Emerson wrote most of the quarterly newsletter. The Emersons researched and assembled the distinctive heritage displays for the society every year that were put up at the annual Heritage Day and Streetsville Bread and Honey celebrations.

Emerson loved music and was a prominent member of the choir at Streetsville United, where the family are long-time members. "We're going to really miss his great booming voice," said long-time friend and former Streetsville Booster Editor Jean Watt.

He was also the organist at the family's cottage at Lake of Bays.

Sandra, his wife of 41 years said Emerson had a special skill in using art to teach any number of subjects, a skill which led him to become deeply involved in the Canadian Society of

Education Through Art (CSEA).

Emerson was president of CSEA from 1974-76 and was later made an honorary member. The inaugural Ray Blackwell Excellence in Art Education Award was also won by Emerson.

He lovingly restored the family's heritage home in Streetsville which was filled with his art, his forefathers tools, artifacts accurate to their period that he rescued from numerous construction sites, and his beloved piano and archives.

Bruce Emerson told mourners at the

funeral that, "as accomplished and skilled as he was, it was the way he did things, the enthusiasm, the passion and care with which he threw himself into life that will stick with us. He was an inspiration as an artist, a teacher, a musician and, of course, a husband, father and grandfather and he did it all so well, and so effortlessly, it seemed like magic."

The family has asked that memorial contributions be made to a charity of choice.

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