

Bata was 'full of life'

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Following in his father's footsteps, he decided to manufacture footwear. He purchased a paper mill in Frankford, and began making shoes with the help of 100 Czech families who accompanied him to Canada.

Frankford resident Donald Farrar, who was at the Batawa community centre Tuesday afternoon to sign a book of condolences, recalled Bata setting up the factory.

"I remember standing on the bridge in 1939 and seeing all the trucks coming with all the machinery on them," said Farrar, whose father opened a store in Batawa in 1941. "If it wasn't for Tommy Bata, there would have been a lot of people out of work in this community."

Batawa, now part of Quinte West, was formed in 1940 by combining Bata's name and the last syllable of Ottawa. The community was built in an attempt to create a small version of Zlin, Czechoslovakia.

"The unique thing about him is that he came here and established that community," Williams said.

On the Batawa Development Corporation's website Bata is quoted as remembering the kindness of people in the Quinte area.

"They were generous to strangers. They exhibited none of the petty suspicion and resistance to change that might have caused us to fail before we started," Bata said. "They joined with us wholeheartedly to build a new Canadian enterprise literally from the ground up."

Batawa resident John Pshebnicky's parents worked for Bata. Pshebnicky was at the Batawa Community Centre to sign the book of condolences Tuesday afternoon.

"He put a lot of food on families tables. He provided my parents with the income to raise me," Pshebnicky said. "He was a good businessman and good to this area."

Bata also helped residents from across Canada by inviting workers to Batawa to earn a living in the factory, Farrar recalled.

"He gave them free train fare



■ Following the death of Thomas Bata, a book of condolences is available for signing at the Batawa Community Centre.

Photo by Bill Tremblay

here if they worked for two or three years," Farrar said. "He also built staff housing over here to accommodate a lot of the workers."

The Batawa shoe factory produced 4.6 million pairs of shoes a year at its peak in the late 1970s. In 1999, production had dropped to less than one million pairs and the factory closed. However, the Bata family continued to contribute to the community.

"The factory isn't there anymore but he has never lost touch with it," Williams said. "They have contributed a huge amount and the fact

they want to develop the town says a lot for them."

Today the Bata Shoe Company serves one million customers per day, employs 40,000 people, and runs 5,000 retail stores and 40 production companies in 25 countries.

"You have to admire his ability and what he has done over the years," Pshebnicky said.

Pshebnicky last saw Bata during the Batawa homecoming celebration held in June.

"He was still full of life," Pshebnicky said. "At 93 years old, you couldn't believe it."