

Tobe, Abe

Unique Rossmore businessman dies at 90

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By Barry Ellsworth

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Abe Tobe, who established the popular Tobe's Country Gardens in Rossmore along with three of his four brothers and his sister, died Monday.

He was 90.

Abe was the last of the Tobes. None of the Tobe boys — Abe, Isaac (Zeke), Sam and David — married and his sister Bluma (Weisinger) had no children. All predeceased Abe.

"They were good people, well liked in the community," said Joe Burke, who knew Abe all his life. "(Abe was) a wonderful guy, generous, very charitable. (He) loved the City of Belleville."

Abe's parents, Moses and Tamara, were among the first Jewish families in Belleville, arriving in 1905. All their children were born here.

Abe attended King George School and Belleville Collegiate Institute and Vocational School. At age 11, Abe and Zeke, then 13, began caddying at the Bay of Quinte Country Club.

"(He was) a big supporter of the (Family) Y (and) the Bay of Quinte Golf Club," Burke said.

In 1938, the Tobes bought a couple of acres of land in Rossmore and set up a hot dog stand. They worked from 7 a.m. to 2 a.m.

Zeke and Abe served in the Second World War — Abe was in the navy.

After the war, the Tobes built a dance hall at the Rossmore site and it became one of the first, if not the first, snack bar where carhops served drive-in customers.

Four of the Tobe children were involved in the business and remained in Belleville, except Sam who moved to the United States.

The Tobe family has since sold the business.

"They were a part of the life in Belleville all those years," said Lee Jourard, who wrote about the family in a synagogue newsletter.

The family established the Moses and Tamara Tobe Foundation — a charity — in honour of their parents.

The Tobes also donated money to purchase trees and their green legacy can be seen along the streets and in parks throughout Belleville. They also donated many trees to the Bay of Quinte Golf Club.

"It was a remarkable family," Jourard said.

A graveside service will be held today at 2:30 p.m. at the Sons of Jacob Memorial Park Cemetery on Highway 2 near Bayside.