

Life stories

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Chomko embodied genuine spirit of civic hero

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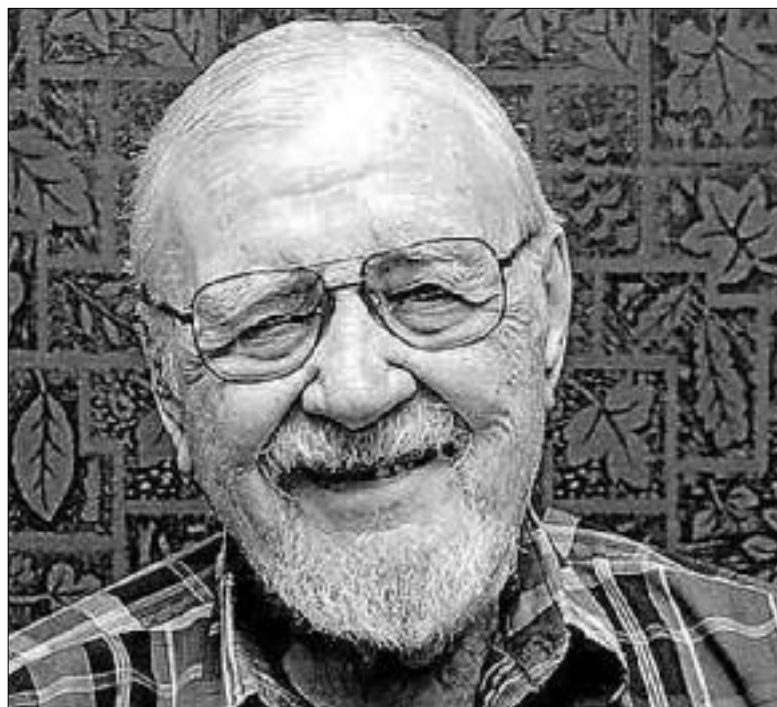
The extraordinary life of Kazimierz Chomko ended Oct. 3 at age 103. His legacy, however, lives on.

The Richmond Hill resident's interesting and eclectic life began in Poland. By age 12 he left home to keep accounts for his aunt, who ran a cafe in Czerna Bialystock, in the east of Poland. Kaz, as his friends knew him, became a police officer. When the Second World War broke out, he served as a tank troop commander with the Canadian Army, where he made a pact with his men to kill no one, but only take prisoners.

Twice during the war, he was captured and escaped.

Anna Carling's book about Kaz's war years, titled *Drop Your Weapons — the Kaz Chomko Story*, was published in 2011, for Kaz's 100th birthday. Not wanting to return to a communist Poland after the war, Kaz immigrated to Canada, where he first worked near Richmond Hill as a farm labourer.

Later, he sold life insurance to loggers in Northern Ontario. It was during that time he met his wife, Doris, who was teaching in Timmins. In the early 1950s, the family moved to a small farm near Lake Ontario between Whitby and Ajax, where he grew strawberries and raspberries and later raised pigs. A



Kazimierz Chomko.

skilled carpenter, he built a house, barn and garage for the family, all of which stand today.

In 1967, when a fall and injury meant he could no longer continue farming, the family moved to Oshawa, where Kaz sold real estate. He decided to retire and devote himself to helping run the St. Vincent de Paul's Marygrove Camp for

disadvantaged girls. Later, Doris also retired and joined him at Marygrove in Penetanguishene.

It was during this time when the Toronto Archdiocese started a program to train lay deacons. Doris encouraged Kaz to participate and helped him with his studies and homework. He was then about 65. After Kaz graduated, he and his

wife moved around a lot, doing missionary work in the Caribbean and British Columbia, before settling down in Ontario.

Eventually, in 1991, they moved to Hesperus, an elder community near Richmond Hill, where Kaz lived until his death. Doris died in 2006.

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In 2014, the Civic Hero Award for Ward 4 was presented to Kaz by Vaughan council. He was recognized for his leadership, peace-making and community volunteerism during his time as a soldier in the Polish Army, under the Canadian flag, and his years serving as a deacon and community volunteer.

"Kazimierz Chomko is an individual that truly embodies the gracious character and genuine spirit

of a civic hero, and we are very fortunate for the contributions he has made to the Vaughan community," Mayor Maurizio Bevilacqua said. "Mr. Chomko has taken the story of his life as a soldier, deacon and community volunteer and transformed it into a message of peace and hope that inspires us and enhances our sense of civic pride."

"Mr. Chomko is a true ambassador for peace and he is wonderful example of volunteerism," said Ward 4 Councillor Sandra Yeung Racco, who nominated him for the award. "He is dedicated to improving the community by helping students develop their literacy skills and he uses his message of peace to motivate others to remain actively involved in civic life."

The award is presented annually to one resident from each of Vaughan's five wards. The awards recognize outstanding achievement and individual contributions to the community.

Kaz is survived by his two sons, Richard and Robert, and by their wives, Elisabeth and Lisa, and their children, Sylvia, Erik, Jonathan, Katrina, Sarah, Dominic and Theresa, and great-grandchildren Rebecca and Jessica.

Kaz's funeral was Oct. 7 at St. Mary Immaculate Church in Richmond Hill and his body was buried in Holy Cross Cemetery, next to that of Doris.

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