

# Life stories

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## Romy Fontana: businessman, community contributor

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Romolo (Romy) Fontana was awarded the Melvin Jones Fellowship, the highest honour bestowed by Lions Clubs International, in 2009.

Romolo (Romy) Fontana threw his heart and soul into everything he did whether it was his business, his volunteer work or his many hobbies.

"He loved life," his widow, Rose Fontana, said. "There was no sitting on the couch, watching TV. That was not his thing."

Fontana was born in Veroli, Italy on April 14, 1935.

He immigrated to Canada in 1954 to join his first wife who was pregnant with their daughter, Michelina.

Fontana worked in construction and juggled two other jobs to make ends meet.

By age 22, he'd scraped together enough money to buy his first house.

Trained as a welder in Italy, he eventually landed in the steel industry working on apartment buildings as well as large industrial and commercial projects.

Fontana rose through the ranks, eventually being promoted to supervisor then foreman.

In 1968, he founded his own company, Romy Ornamental Steel, and grew it into a highly successful business.

Wanting a less stressful occupation, Fontana sold the firm in the late 1970s and obtained his real

estate licence.

Along the way, he and his first wife had two more children, Giorgio and Romy Jr. But, by the mid-1980s, they divorced.

Fontana continued to enjoy success working for a Toronto real estate firm where he garnered top honours five years straight.

It was there Fontana met Rose Abbato, recently widowed, who would become his life partner for the next 30 years.

"I remember it clearly," she said of their first encounter. "We were on the second floor and he came up dressed in this amazing suit and tie. ... He was tall, dark — just

perfect."

In 1985, Fontana and two business partners established a real estate company, which they grew to house 30 sales representatives.

A couple of years later, he and Rose moved to Maple.

Following that, he founded Romy Realty Services, where he worked alongside Rose until his death last September.

"We did pretty well everything, 90 per cent of our things together — working, living. We were very close in that sense," said Rose, who married Fontana during small ceremony in 2000.

Shortly after moving to

Vaughan, Fontana joined the Maple Lions Club where he became actively involved in several initiatives including the Turkey Shoot and the annual pancake festival.

When the farm that hosted the Turkey Shoot was sold for development, Fontana convinced the city to allow the club to relocate the event to the Keele Valley dumpsite.

"He kept it going. He brought out all his friends and we did very well with that (fundraiser)," said Fred Cook, a longtime friend and fellow Lion.

And when the Lions Club lost its meeting space, Fontana persuaded city hall to let the group take over the former library building on Merino Road, which was going to be bulldozed and the land sold for development, Cook said.

A natural leader, Fontana served as president of the Lions Club for two years, from 1997 to 1999.

During his tenure, the club celebrated its 50th anniversary.

Fontana organized a huge gala celebration at Le Parc Banquet Hall attended by several local dignitaries.

"When he became president of the club, the club grew. It was a friendly place and we all had fun," Cook said.

Fontana also played a pivotal role in the creation of Maple Lions Park. He designed and helped con-

struct the steel arch that serves as the gateway to Cunningham Drive park.

For his dedication and many contributions, Fontana was awarded the Melvin Jones Fellowship, the highest honour bestowed by Lions Clubs International, in 2009.

"He was just an outgoing type of guy and I don't think there was a problem he couldn't solve, really," Cook said.

Fontana could also repair virtually anything, Rose said.

"I wanted to get a new toaster, but I couldn't because he would always fix the damn thing," she said.

Brimming with energy, Fontana always found time for his myriad other passions — hunting, bowling, dancing and gardening, Rose said.

He planted two large vegetable gardens every year, one at home and one at the cottage near, Orillia, sharing the bounty with family and friends.

Fontana also deeply loved his children and his three grandchildren, she said.

Sadly, his time with them ended Sept. 3, 2015 when he died of heart failure at age 80.

"The way he lived his life, he lived it until the end," Rose said. "It's not like he was suffering for months, he was still out there in the garden until the very end."

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