

<https://www.wellingtonadvertiser.com/residents-line-elora-street-to-pay-tribute-to-late-businessman-merlen-kropf/>

Sunday, January 30, 2022 | Vol 55 Issue 04

Residents line Elora street to pay tribute to late businessman Merlen Kropf

Formerly the largest independent grocer in Ontario, Kropf died on Jan. 19

Joanne Shuttleworth January 28, 2022 @ 3:09 pm [News](#)

[Add to Favourites](#)



Dozens of people lined the sidewalk outside the Geddes Street Market in Elora on Friday afternoon to pay tribute to the late Merlen Kropf.

Photos by Kelly Waterhouse

ELORA – On Jan. 28 members of the community lined the sidewalk outside the Geddes Street Market to pay tribute to late businessman Merlen Kropf.

“It’s not a parade,” said family friend Leslie Stewart in advance of the event.

“I just want people to stand there. But it’s a way to pay our respects.”

Stewart organized the tribute to recognize Merlen as his family drove his remains from the funeral home to the cemetery following a private service.

Some who took part wore jerseys and clothing featuring Merlen’s favourite NHL team, the Montreal Canadiens.

From humble beginnings on a Mennonite farm to building a successful grocery store chain, Merlen earned a name for himself as a savvy businessman, a man of faith, and a man of generous heart, whose contributions were often anonymous or behind the scenes.

He died on Jan. 19 of complications after a stroke. He was 88.

His daughter Debra Kropf said in a phone interview that while her father didn’t have much of a formal education, he was good with numbers, good with people and a hard worker – and it was this and his determination that led to his success.



MERLEN KROPPF

He met his wife Doreen in a grocery store in Kitchener – he was the manager and she was a customer – and they were married for 61 years.

Debra said her mother suffered some health issues at the same time her dad had his stroke and is receiving respite care at a local facility. The family is now focussing on getting her healthy again, she said.

“It’s hard for her – 61 years married *and* partners in business. They were inseparable,” Debra said.

In 1965 Merlen bought the former Steinburg’s grocery store location in Fergus, near the corner of St. Andrew Street and St. David Street North where a Tim Hortons now stands, “and pretty much every two years he’d open a new store,” Debra said.

His second store was the L&M in Elora and by the 1980s he had 10 stores in towns throughout southwestern Ontario. He later added two golf courses to his holdings.

“As a child, he was not home a lot – he was always working, and over the years mom became part of the business, too,” Debra said.

She and her brother Dale “started working at the store when we were very young and it became a real family affair.

“Dad was the largest independent grocer in Ontario for many years and he’s won many awards, including a lifetime achievement award from the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers.”

Related Articles

- [Grocers group recognizes Merlen Kropf, L&M Markets](#)

Debra opened the Geddes Street Market in Elora last year in the same building that housed the L&M once owned by her father.

Merlen and his wife Doreen were both able to attend the soft opening last June, “and he loved that I opened the store again, although he did complain that the aisles were too wide,” Debra said with a laugh.

“He thought I should squeeze in an extra aisle but I said, ‘Dad, this is COVID. People want space.’”

After family, Merlen’s love was hockey and he was a devout Montreal Canadiens fan.

“That’s how I came to know Merlen,” said Lance Roberts, a longtime friend and NHL referee from 1987 to 2001.

“He came to a few games in Montreal that I refereed. In 2001 he came to Switzerland to watch me referee the Spengler Cup and we spent some quality time together.

“I’m going to miss him. This is a hard one.”



Leslie Stewart organized the tribute to recognize Merlen Kropf as his family drove his remains from the funeral home to the cemetery following a private service. She wore Merlen’s Montreal Canadiens scarf in tribute.

Gary Cooper said he and Merlen became fast friends the first time they met.

Cooper opened Gary Cooper Chevrolet in Fergus in 1993 and Merlen, who also loved cars, came in to meet the new owner.

“We hit it off as friends and stayed friends until the end. And I sold him all his vehicles, including the 25th edition Corvette he was so proud of,” Cooper said.

With his finances in good shape, Merlen was able to treat his family to travel and other luxuries, but he never forgot his roots, Cooper noted.

“Merlen was such a behind-the-scenes person,” he said.

“I don’t think people realized all that he did. From family to his church group, to sports groups in the community – if you needed help you could always go to Merlen.”

Debra said she is just now learning about some of her father’s contributions.

“He sponsored sports teams, gave money to the hospital, sponsored race cars and employed a number of people over the years. He was a mentor to so many people,” she said.

“But he always saw himself as that little Mennonite boy.”

Due to COVID-19 the Jan. 28 funeral was restricted to family only.

Debra said a celebration of life will be held in the spring or summer when people can meet outdoors again.

Joanne Shuttleworth

Reporter