Written by Carol Pomeday
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‘Peanuts’ oversaw rapid growth during 22-year village tenure

Former Belgium Village President Donald J. Schommer, who everyone called Peanuts, was a staunch supporter of Belgium who was always seeking ways to make the village better, said people who worked with him.

He got his nickname because he ate so many peanuts as a kid, his wife Mary said.

“I never called him that. I called him Don,” she said.

Mr. Schommer, 69, died Saturday, Aug. 14, at his home on North Street following a long battle with cancer.

Mr. Schommer served the village from 1983 to 2009 — 16 years as president and eight years as a trustee.

“I’ve always had my heart and soul here and that’s why I’ve stayed here this long,” Mr. Schommer said last year when he was challenged at the polls for only the second time during his political career.

During his tenure, the village’s population tripled, subdivisions popped up and an industrial park developed. He oversaw the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant and parks flourished.

Mr. Schommer wanted a casino, but it wasn't to be, and the grocery store he desired failed after one year, although he and his wife were faithful shoppers.

Those disappointments were outweighed by the many projects he spearheaded that continue to flourish.

Proud of his Luxembourg roots, Mr. Schommer was a founder of the Luxembourg Festival 24 years ago and president the entire time.

Too ill to attend this year's festival, he watched the antique farm equipment parade from his window on Aug. 7 because it was re-routed past his house.

Mr. Schommer was a strong supporter of the Luxembourg-American Cultural Center and did everything he could to promote it and bring it to the village.

Although most people knew him as a village leader, children and their parents remember him as a beloved Santa Claus, who helped children onto his lap and listened to their wishes.

Mr. Schommer assumed the role in 2000 and later became Father Christmas for adult parties, wearing a beautiful green velvet outfit his daughter bought for him in New York.

"It keeps me young. Your heart feels different," Mr. Schommer told Ozaukee Press three years ago. "I like the good feeling you get making children happy. Even parents get a glow. I tell them the real meaning of Christmas is the birthday of Jesus. It's about giving, not just getting."

That's what Mr. Schommer did, said Dan Birenbaum, Belgium public works director and fire chief.

"He was a good man. He was very supportive of the fire department," Mr. Birenbaum said.

"He was supportive of all the organizations and went to every function. He did a lot of good for the village. He will be missed."

Long-time friend Ron Weyker, who served 15 years on the Village Board with Mr. Schommer and grew up across the road from him, said Mr. Schommer was disappointed but not bitter when he lost last year to current Village President Kevin Kowalkowski.

"That's not his style. He could never be bitter," Mr. Weyker said.

"Peanuts always had a very positive attitude and always tried to do what was best for the village to bring quality developments."

Mr. Schommer was proud to be a U.S. Marine. He served in the corps from 1958 to 1963.

A founder of the Snowrunners Snowmobile Club in Belgium, he helped maintain the county's trail system with the club's trail groomer.

He was an active member of the Belgium American Legion Post 412 and the Belgium Lions Club.

Mr. Schommer was a Civil War buff who enjoyed visiting battlefields. He was an avid Green Bay Packers, Milwaukee Brewers and NASCAR fan.

He was a busy man, but always found time to enjoy a glass of wine in front of the fireplace with his wife Mary.

Pat Birenbaum, who served on the Plan Commission with Mr. Schommer and heads the T-baum Foundation started in memory of his son Tyler, said Mr. Schommer comforted him when he lost his son and he comforted Mr. Schommer when his daughter Dawn died.

In memory of his daughter, Mr. Schommer sponsored a $10 home-run fund-raiser for the T-baum Foundation on fireworks night every year during the Friday night softball league in Belgium.

“Before he threw out the first ball, he would say, ‘Tell your children every day that you love them. You never know when something may happen,” Mr. Birenbaum said.

Mr. Schommer was born Sept. 8, 1940 in Sheboygan, the son of Joseph and Eugenia Breyer Schommer.

He grew up in Dacada and graduated from Random Lake High School in 1958.

On Sept. 17, 1966, he and Mary Smith were married at St. Nicholas Catholic Church in Dacada

The couple settled in Belgium shortly after their marriage.

Mr. Schommer was a semi-trailer truck driver for Kohl’s Foods for more than 30 years, retiring in 2000. He was also a partner of a limousine service for several years.

Mr. Schommer is survived by his wife Mary of Belgium, daughter Dana Schaff of Kimberly and granddaughter Tatum Schaff.

He is also survived by his brother Robert (Jean) of Fort Myers, Fla.; sisters Margaret (Gilbert) Miller of Random Lake, Ruth Heuer of Grafton, Kathleen Thelen of Saukville and Monica (Steve) Frantz of Greer, S.C.; brothers-in-law Jerome Doll of Port Washington, Richard (Betty) Smith of Springfield, Va., and Paul (Cathleen) Smith of San Marcos, Calif.

He was preceded in death by his parents, daughter Dawn Schommer and sister Delores Doll.

A Mass of Christian burial was scheduled for 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 18, at Holy Rosary Parish, Holy Cross Chapel. Father Jim Ernster was to officiate.

Visitation was scheduled from noon to 3 p.m. followed by military rites at Eernisse Funeral

Home in Port Washington

A second visitation was set for 5 p.m. until the Mass at Holy Cross Chapel.

Memorials to the American Cancer Society are suggested.

Donald Schommer, 1940 to 2010