Written by Steve Ostermann
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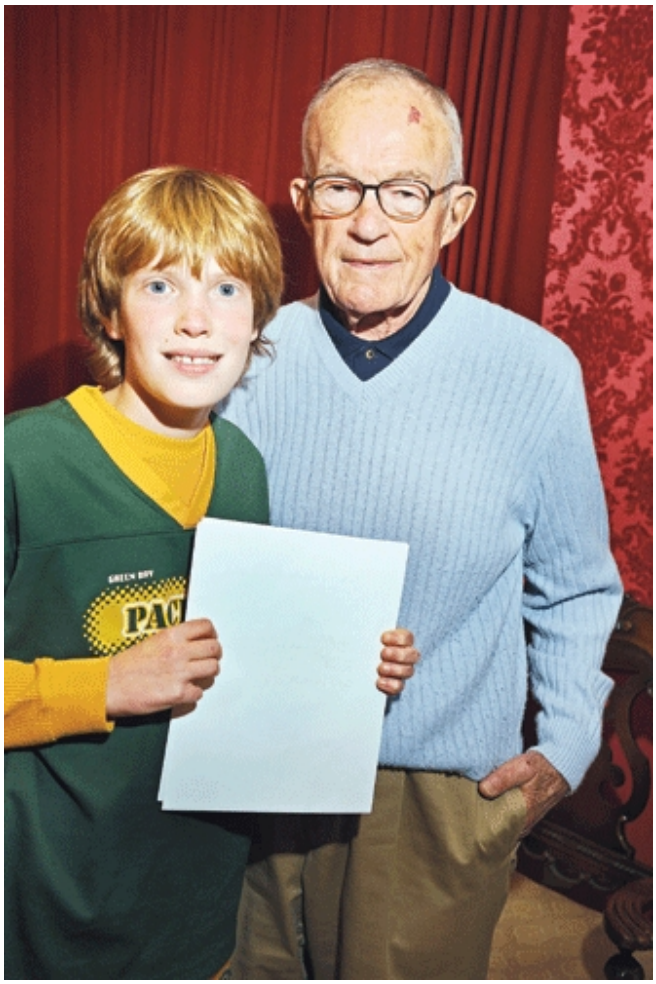
Longtime local leader chosen for Chamber honor after a special nomination



Recipients of the Grafton Area Chamber of Commerce's annual Outstanding Citizen Award are typically surprised and humbled to be chosen for the honor.

Norbert Studelska Sr., this year's recipient, is no exception.

But Studelska was especially touched because an 11-year-old boy close to his heart asked the Chamber to consider him for the recognition.

"Oh my gosh, I was just shocked," Studelska said of his selection. "I was serving food at the local senior center when Nancy Hundt (Chamber executive director) came in with my grandson Chase Bohan and told me.

"Chase nominated me, and I didn't even know it. I was very humbled."

In his nomination letter, Chase cited his grandfather's 50-plus years of service to

Grafton schools, Scouting, government and St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

"As you can see, my grandpa is an amazing man," he wrote. "I hope you choose him for outstanding citizen."

Nomination letters for the citizen award are usually sent to the Chamber by friends, co-workers or other people who have close relationships with the nominee.

"But this one was different," Hundt said. "It was really lovely."

Chase — the son of Jim and Elaine Bohan — had plenty of reasons for wanting his granddad to be honored.

After moving to Grafton in 1955, Studelska quickly became an active member of the community he remembers as "a quiet, little, beautiful hamlet by the river."

He was elected to the School Board and remained a member for more than 30 years until 1992, including the final 10 years as president.

Besides serving as a Boy Scout leader for 20 years, he helped his late wife Elaine oversee a Girl Scout troop.

He was a member of the village's Board of Review and a committee that oversaw the construction of the municipal swimming pool and currently serves on the Historic Preservation Commission.

His membership at St. Joseph's Church has included service on numerous groups, including a committee that oversaw a major expansion in 1999.

First and foremost, Studelska and his wife raised seven children and enjoyed watching their family grow to include 12 grandkids.

Studelska said his first visit to Grafton made an indelible impression.

"In 1952, I lived in Milwaukee and was working for the gas company in the summer when I came here for a job at a house on 12th Avenue," he recalled.

"I was digging on a line when this fellow walks up and asks me how things were

going."

The fellow, it turned out, was Ralph Zaun, a local banker and longtime benefactor of Grafton civic, social, recreational and educational projects.

"Ralph was the first person in Grafton I met," Studelska said. "I found it be such a friendly community, and I fell in love with it."

Grafton has undergone many changes through the years, most notably a period of rapid residential and commercial expansion in the past decade. However, it's still a great place to live and raise a family, Studelska believes.

Despite his admirable resumé, Studelska said receiving service awards has never been a goal.

"I've never looked at public service as anything extraordinary," he said. "It's just something that you do because you want to give back to a community that's been good to you and your family."

Studelska's Chamber award will require him to take the spotlight — however reluctantly — at a pair of major holiday events Saturday, Nov. 28. In addition to serving as the marshal of the 30th annual Grafton Christmas Parade, he will be recognized during the
community Christmas celebration at 4 p.m. at Grafton High School.

"It's a great honor," he said. "I never saw it coming."

During the celebration, the Chamber will also present its annual Outstanding Community Group award to Ozaukee Family Services.

The agency, which operates out of the Family Enrichment Center in Grafton, has for years provided a variety of educational and support services for families and individuals ranging from infants to senior citizens.

Operating with the equivalent of five full-time staff members and 150 volunteers, the agency assisted more than 8,100 area residents last year.

ONE OF CHASE BOHAN'S Christmas wishes came true when a nomination letter he wrote helped his grandfather Norbert Studelska Sr. receive the Outstanding Citizen Award from the Grafton Area Chamber of Commerce.

Photo by Sam Arendt