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'Leave this world a little better than you found it'

Fred Chapman's legacy to Ionia County

By Karen Bota
The Ionia Sentinel-Standard

Posted Jul 27, 2012 @ 11:57 PM

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"He had such a diverse background, he could connect with people very well. He was very good at motivation," she said. "It's a very big loss for road commissions state-wide, not just us."

Pohl said Chapman accomplished more in his six years on the ICRC than many people can do "in 12 or 18 years. It's the kind of person he was, very dynamic. He took everything he was doing to heart. We were lucky."

"He cared about everything and everybody. He was a real gentleman," said Chuck Minkley, who served with him on the ICRC board. "He invested his time, not just as a joiner but he invested his time to make everything a better organization."

"He was compassionate and had a great spirit of giving," said Bill Weisgerber, who also served with Chapman on the road commission board. "He felt that he owed something to the community that has given him so much."

Weisgerber said when he spoke with Chapman last, "he was upset that he couldn't finish the commitments to things he'd gotten involved in."

Chapman was active in community activities as well. Locally he served as secretary of the Ionia Rotary Club, and he was elected to the Ionia Free Fair board of directors. He served two years as president of the Free Fair – an Ionia County mainstay that his father, Fred Chapman Sr. co-founded. He also was active and held leadership positions in his church, SS. Peter & Paul Catholic Parish in Ionia.

"Fred Chapman will be greatly missed by the Rotary of Ionia, not only for his positive and affable personality, but also for his creativity and leadership," said Jeff Winters, Rotary of Ionia president. "The passing of Fred is a great loss for the Ionia community. Our thoughts and prayers go out to his family."

Laurie Chapman-Bosco said she remembers her father's civic mindedness.

"He was always volunteering, doing something for the community. He wanted to be part of something better," she said. "I remember my cousin complaining to my dad. He said, 'You can complain about it or be part of the solution.'"

Michigan State Senator Judy Emmons also remembered his commitment to the county and his work ethic. No matter what meeting she attended, Chapman was there as well.

"He was focused on the future and how he could address the problem he faced, solving it, working together to get to some sort of solution and moving on in a positive direction," she said. "No one props up an entire community by themselves, but Fred was an important cog in the whole gear that makes Ionia County a great place to be. What a great example he set for us."

Mayor Dan Balice said as a child he heard a lot about Chapman, and got to know him and work alongside him as an adult.

"He was a first-class public servant with a first-class intellect. He brought a level of professionalism to everything he did," Balice said. "He was good for local government, for the Free Fair, for the road commission, and he did it with a good sense of humor and keen insight into the process and problem solving."

"One of the things he taught me was that some people retire from their profession and think of it as a time no longer to be useful to society," Balice said. "I have met a lot of people who have showed me this is not only unnecessary, but a tremendous waste of ability. Fred was one of them."

Not only did Chapman give his time to make the community better, he had "a strong moral and ethical compass to do the right thing," Chapman III said of his father. "He was always beyond reproach."

Chapman worked for a company once that wanted him to "cook the books," his daughter Laurie Chapman-Bosco remembered. "He was an executive and he quit. It took him a while to get a new job. He said, 'You can spend a lifetime to build a reputation of being trustworthy. If you ruin it, you can't be trusted again.'"

Chapman believed there was a right way to do things, and that was with integrity, Chapman III said of his father.

"He said, 'When in doubt, always err on the side of doing the right thing.' Ultimately that integrity that put him in good stead with people," Chapman III said. "He brought me up with integrity, with honesty, and to treat people the way you wanted to be treated. Now it's easy for me to make that decision because that's the way my dad brought me up. There's no deviation, no fuzziness – it's this way. That's how I roll."

"I passed that on to my four children," Chapman III said. "That's really my dad's legacy."

The family will receive friends and relatives from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. Sunday at the Lake Funeral Home, 3521 S. State St., Ionia; and at 10 a.m. on Monday prior to the 11 a.m. burial Mass at SS. Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Ionia.

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