

Sztanyo remembered as kind, honest and fair

By Sherry Barnum

sherrybarnum@ogemawherald.com

PRESCOTT — Zig Ziglar said, “You never know when a moment and a few sincere words can impact a life forever,” and in 93 years, Emil “Stan” Sztanyo impacted the Prescott community with his kindness and dedication to the village.

“My dad was a principled man with an energetic and positive outlook on work and life in general,” Mark Sztanyo said. “After the war he shared (with many others) a large heap of optimism and enthusiasm for this great land and brought that to his family and the community where he lived. In his mind, things could always be better — all it took was getting busy and doing it.”

“One of his most famous lines that still rings in my ears is, ‘You know, son, there is no such word as can’t!’ He often said he was a jack of all trades and master of none,” Mark said. “But I, and many people who knew him, would argue with that, as he mastered much in life. These are the same traits that we fondly think of any revered community leader, and he had them.”

Emil grew up in the Twining/Turner area, where he attended Turner School and graduated from Standish. He also met his wife, Iris (Forshee) Sztanyo, while playing for the Northeastern Michigan Baseball League. Together they shared 72 years of marriage.

Emil, a WWII veteran, joined the Army Air Corps in 1941 at 19 years old and proudly and heroically served as a night fighter pilot with the 415th Night Fighter Squadron. He stayed in the service for about 4 1/2 years and then went into the reserves afterward.

In 1945, Emil and Iris set up residence in Prescott, where they ran a furniture store and C.L. Forshee and Sons Funeral Homes and remained active in Judson Baptist Church for more than 50 years, serving as a deacon and trustee.

“The funeral home kept us quite busy,” Emil told the Independent in 2013. “I was the Ogemaw County coroner for years.”

Emil’s son Mark said his father served in this posi-

“My dad was a principled man with an energetic and positive outlook on work and life in general.”

— Mark Sztanyo

tion for 31 years.

“Jeanne Provost is the hairdresser at The Brook, and while giving dad a haircut she asked him a very poignant question, which I never did,” he said. “She asked, ‘Stan, why did you give up the funeral business? You were so very good at it.’ He paused, lowered his head, and said, ‘I had to (and welling up said) I buried too many of my friends.’”

Emil also served on the Whittemore-Prescott School Board for 25 years and was influential in getting the school placed where it sits today. Twenty-one of those years he served as president.

Emil told the Independent in 2013 he was part of the consolidation of Whittemore-Prescott and influential in getting the school placed where it sits today.

“Whittemore and Prescott were two separate schools at the time,” he said. “We had a lot of little schools and tried to combine with whoever would. We went after Sterling and Hale, and if we would have gotten Hale we were going to put the school on M-55. We had about eight schools we tried to consolidate with, but no one wanted to combine.”

“So we decided on Whittemore and Prescott and put them halfway between the two towns,” Emil said. “Sen. C.T. Prescott gave us a piece of land to build on, so we built by his house, and that is why the school sits on the Iosco-Ogemaw county lines.”

Emil said after Whittemore-Prescott consolidated, the other schools in the area followed suit.

Mark said his father did not serve on the board for the money.

“I can share this now, but he would be embarrassed that I did, for his 25 years on the board and 21 as president, he insisted on very, very low pay,” he said. “He completely viewed his work with the school as community service. Many who get

involved with roles like this serve while their kids are active. Dad had a very real commitment to our schools, our youth and our future.”

Dorothy Lehman, who served on the board with Emil, said he was an excellent board member.

“I served with him on the board in 1975,” she said. “He was a great man and he treated everybody good.”

“He was a very fair man and he could have been on the board forever if he kept running,” she said.

Lehman said she could not pinpoint one fond memory of their time on the board together, because they were all good.

“Him and his wife, Iris, were very nice people,” she said. “Some of my sons loved golfing with him, and he was a very good man. He treated everybody with respect, and I don’t think he ever said a bad word about anybody that I can recall.”

Lehman said the entire board from then remained good friends.

“There was Emil, George Erickson, Ilene Phelps, Ron Horn, Buck Pavlik and Jim Dobson,” she said. “We were all very good friends and remained friends for 50 years.”

“Even when I got remarried four years ago, most of them were there,” Lehman said. “I just have to say that he was a very great person and believed in treating everybody fairly. He didn’t have a bad word to say about anybody — he was a great person and he and I were a good team.”

Arnie Engster recalls Emil as a very down-to-earth person.

“He and Iris were just wonderful people to be around,” Engster said. “I’m sure they had their times they got upset with people, but you never witnessed it.”

“Emil was the president of the board when I was hired as Prescott Elementary principal in 1964,” he said.

Engster said Emil was a



Emil Sztanyo poses for a photo with his wife, Iris.

MARK SZTANYO/COURTESY PHOTO

man that he could always trust.

“If you wanted his opinion he would tell you like it is; he wasn’t a wishy-washy type of person,” he said. “He was so diplomatic and you always respected what he said even if you didn’t agree. That’s how he was. He had a reason for his answer, whatever it was, and I always appreciated him throughout the years.”

“He was just a nice man and pleasure to know in the community,” Engster said.

Mark said although the small village of Prescott is suffering today, it wasn’t always like that.

“In the past, there were some great people who together made the community a real nice ‘Mayberry’-like town. My dad was one of them,” Mark said. “Dad lived over and over again by the principle of ‘grow where you’re planted.’ That’s what he did.”

Mark said Prescott was important to Emil because it was home and he loved it, so he dived in full.

“He even went to Lansing, as a committee of one, to try and get the politicians convinced of re-directing I-75 closer to Prescott and other small communities to bolster their local economies,” he said. “He failed — but tried nonetheless. Prescott was where he would work, build his home, go to church, raise his family and serve in the community. He didn’t criticize the area with its shortcomings; rather he held his head high and proud of its

accomplishments. If you were looking for one to play the pity party and feel woeful about his town and where he was from, you were looking at the wrong guy.”

“Prescott was home, the people were friends, and dad was always upbeat and happy there,” Mark said. “Your home is where your heart is, and his was with his wife in Prescott.”

Mark said his dad gave him his second and very memorable airplane ride and then enough rides after that to sink the hook.

“He loved flight and was an excellent pilot,” Mark said. “It was easy for me to follow, after I experienced the wonder and awe in his eyes.”

Mark said there are many things that he admires about his dad, Emil “Stan” Sztanyo.

“After all he was from the ‘greatest generation,’ he was and is my greatest hero,” Mark said. “He was athletic; and not only passed his loved of sport on but gave me a myriad of tips along the way. He was a leader; from his unique and rare contributions in WWII as one of the elite aviators in the famed 415th Night Fighter Squadron, to his community, church, bank and school board roles, and finally to his closer-to-home family involvement, he led. And did so with wisdom and skill.”

Mark said now four generations have been impacted by a life lived out in such a way.

“What do I admire most? Out of virtually nothing, dad became

something that benefited others,” Mark said. “He repaired a broken link and passed on something good. You and I can too.”

“When someone leaves us that we admired or revered we often say something quite simple like, ‘He was a good guy,’” he said. “But oftentimes there is a lot more behind that little phrase. We probably all have used it, but when we actually think about it a bit relating to a person, what are those things behind that phrase? Invariably, the person had and lived out values and traits that quite frankly are always in our top 10 like cream that rises to the top.”

Mark said the character traits we admire most in people are universal, and he would argue eternal.

“Emil Sztanyo was a community leader, a quality friend, a good husband (72 years), and a great one from the greatest generation. He was a lot of good things to a lot of fine people,” Mark said. “To me, however, he was my dad for 93 wonderful years, my hero, and if I can be so bold — he was a real ‘good guy.’”

Emil Sztanyo passed away Sept. 24, 2015.

He is survived by his beloved wife of 72 years, Iris (Forshee) Sztanyo; and by his three children, Richard (Sheila) Wayne Sztanyo of Pelham, Ala., Marcia (Frank) Lee Duncan of Frankfort, Ill., and Mark (Barbara) Jeffrey Sztanyo of Florence, Ky.; eight grandchildren; and 14 great-grandchildren.



**See all the friendly faces
in your community...**

The Arenac County
INDEPENDENT

**Birth, Engagement &
Wedding Announcements**

School Sports & Activities

New Business Features

**Community Events
& “Your Thoughts”**

**Meeting
Coverage**

**Subscribe & save!
See form on page 10A**

www.arenacindependent.com