

The Elk Man may be gone, but his legacy remains



Feb. 11, 2020

By Kristena Schutt-Moore

Joe 'The Elk Man' Neuhold always said that when he passed away his friends should get together and have a party. So that is what they did.

When The Elk Man died just shy of his 91st birthday, those whose lives he touched gathered at the Mayo Community Centre on his birthday, Saturday, Feb. 8, to honour his memory and share stories and dance to Neuhold's favourite music. He adored a lively polka, and in his youth could play a mean accordion.

But his true love was nature, being out in the woods with his elk. Neuhold became known as The Elk Man when he opened up his fields, on the 2,000-acre property he was caretaker of, to the elk who needed a habitat of their own. Farmers were having problems with the elk that had been brought into the area back in 2000. So Neuhold decided to lend a hand.

'The farmers weren't bad, they just didn't want their fields wrecked, so I said let them [the elk] come here,' the Elk Man stated to Bancroft This Week during his 90th birthday party last year.

He already had winter feeding stations set up for the white-tail deer to help them get through hard cold winters when food wasn't easy to access, so Neuhold decided to expand the feeding operation and soon the elk came to his barn in herds. Community members

also started coming in to help, dropping off feed and lending a hand when a project such as a new feeder or storage shed needed to be built.

His driveway was soon full of people stopping in to get pictures of the elk, including school buses, TV crews and tour groups with the Bancroft and District Chamber of Commerce. Having the elk in his backyard became a natural tourism draw for the community and legend of 'The Elk Man' began.

The Elk Man came to McArthurs Mills from Austria, through Peterborough. Born in Bruck, Austria on Feb. 8, 1929, The Elk Man lived through the Second World War and Austria's occupation by first the Nazis and then the Red Army. After the war he went to work at a printing shop where he developed skills in mechanics. He then trained as a diesel mechanic and when he saw a notice by the federal government of Canada looking for skilled tradesmen he moved to Canada. It was a fresh start, but not speaking the best English, he worked on a large farm in Ontario for three years. The Elk Man said to Bancroft This Week last year at his 90th birthday party that he worked on the farm as a way to 'prove to the government that I would be a good Canadian' and learned the language from the farmer he worked for.

After his three-year term in the government program was finished, The Elk Man moved from the farm to Peterborough to work as a diesel mechanic for a company there. Soon though, he and a colleague started their own company and travelled throughout Eastern Ontario filling the need for mechanical skills.

Unfortunately, before his retirement, his wife Edith passed away in 1996. Shortly after that was when The Elk Man moved to McArthurs Mills to the cottage that he and his wife had planned to move to after he retired. Eventually he got the job as maintenance man at the 2,000-acre property where he soon started caring for deer and then elk.

People said that The Elk Man took care of the elk of North Hastings but he would respond that they were taking care of him. At his 90th birthday party last year the Elk Man said, 'they have a way, they don't say a word, but they have a way of making you feel better even on the worst days.'