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Remembering well-known Savage resident George Augustinack

By Christine Schuster cschuster@swpub.com December 5, 2018



Longtime Savage resident, vice president of the Dan Patch Historical Society and active community member George Augustinack died last month of a heart attack. He was 77.

“When you said ‘George’ around Savage you did not have to say the last name because everyone knew who you were talking about,” said Savage Mayor Janet Williams.

Augustinack moved to Savage from St. Cloud in the 1960s, when he was in

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his early-20s, according to family members. He soon started his own printing company in Savage, AllType Printing, and began buying up commercial real estate properties around town.

“You’d see him out and about just all over,” Williams said.

He notoriously enjoyed dining out for breakfast and lunch.

“Even if he didn’t have anyone to go with, he’d just go and there’d be regulars,” said Tausha Chamberland, Augustinack’s daughter. “He would always get to know you. He’d get to know the owners and waitresses — he could talk. He was never at a loss for words.”

Over meals, many of them at the Windmill Cafe, Augustinack made friends around town and began learning about the life of M.W. Savage and his record-setting racehorse, Dan Patch. As a printer, he became deeply interested in Mr. Savage’s advertising prowess and ability to transform Dan Patch into a bona fide celebrity.

“He was intrigued with the man behind it all,” Chamberland said.

During Dan Patch’s champion reign in harness racing, Savage — a Minneapolis businessman — capitalized on his horse’s fame, making Dan Patch a household name with various products named after the racer, who was housed in what later became the city of Savage.

Soon Augustinack began collecting all the Savage and Dan Patch memorabilia he could get his hands on. In the early days of collecting, Chamberland said, he picked up a lot of items from original owners who still lived in the area. Later he kept his eye on eBay and other online auction websites.

In the book “Crazy Good: The True Story of Dan Patch, the Most Famous

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Horse in America,” author Charles Leerhsen describes Augustinack’s peculiar collection. Items included a horse tail, harness, a scale model of the farm where Dan Patch lived, photographs of people who worked at the farm, even items of clothing seen worn in the photos.

“Sometime over the last forty years’, George notes unnecessarily, “I got carried away,” Leerhsen wrote. Also during this interview, Augustinack noted with “a mysterious wink” that he thought he’d still be able to track down items missing from his collection, such as M.W. Savage’s false teeth and belt buckle.

On March 24, 1992, Augustinack attended the first-ever meeting of the Dan Patch Historical Society. He served as the group’s vice president until his death.

“George was involved in all kinds of activities in town,” Williams said. “As a newcomer, he chose to be involved.”

Many of Chamberland’s memories with her father revolve around his involvement in the historical society. For the past decade, the two designed the Dan Patch Days buttons, which are purchased by collectors all over the country. Williams said once the year’s button was made, Augustinack was rarely seen without it pinned to his shirt.

“He was like a walking encyclopedia,” Chamberland said. “What amazed me is that he remembered it all — he could rattle off dates, he just knew everything.”

Augustinack’s eclectic interests were not limited to local history. Williams said he also was a beekeeper and kept purple martins, a type of swallow, in birdhouses at his home. Williams remembers him bringing her mother honey from his bees.

“He was always go, go, go,” Chamberland said. “He was always busy and always had stuff to do.”

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Williams said Augustinack became part of the city's fabric.

“He cared a lot about the city and the history and all of that for someone who moved in,” Williams said.

Augustinack is survived by his wife of 46 years, “Bea”; siblings Pat, Carol and Phil; his daughter and his granddaughters, April and Amber.