

A CRAFTSMAN of landmarks and life

Carpenter devoted to love of family, Germany and Canada as well as work that lives on around Winnipeg

Am 1. April 2024 starb Hubert Kondziela. Seit den 1950er Jahren war er in der Deutschen Vereinigung von Winnipeg als auch im Deutsch-Kanadischen Kongress als Präsident 2000-2004, im Vorstand und als freiwilliger Helfer tätig. Eine Würdigung seines Lebens und seiner Errungen erschien am 10. Mai 2025 in der Winnipeg Free Press. Der DKK dankt sich bei der Winnipeg Free Press für die freundliche Genehmigung, den Artikel im Info-blatt abdrucken zu dürfen.

Hubert Kondziela passed away on April 1, 2024. In Winnipeg since the 1950s, he was active in both the German Society of Winnipeg (GSW) and the German-Canadian Congress, serving as President, 2000-2004), as well as on the board and as a volunteer. This tribute to his life and achievements was published in the Winnipeg Free Press on May 10, 2025. The GCC thanks the Winnipeg Free Press for their kind permission to reprint the article in the Infoblatt.

A LIFE'S STORY

A tribute to those who left a mark on our province

JANINE LEGAL

CHANCES are anyone familiar with Winnipeg will have seen some of the creative works of Hubert Kondziela.

Unlike gallery pieces, where each one features the signature of the artist, Kondziela's craftsmanship doesn't come with a label, but they remain part of his legacy and the historical beauty of this city.

From giant artifacts and cultural landmarks — including a seven-metre windmill for a local garden centre that still stands, complete with revolving sails — to significant repairs to the exterior and interior of the Witch's Hut in Kildonan Park, Kondziela's contributions to the aesthetics of Winnipeg will live on.

Meticulously sanding, fixing and painting the gingerbread motifs on the exterior walls of that iconic park piece, the craftsman also designed and built several structures for Folklorama, including a large portable stage. For the Christmas Market, he created a gingerbread hut and two nutcrackers measuring eight feet high.

The carpenter was in high demand well into his senior years, building apartment blocks, custom-designing homes and furniture and renovating and remodelling several homes and businesses, including an extension on the illustrious Red Top restaurant.

"He never really stopped," said his daughter Monique Kondziela. "In his 80s, he was repairing the roof of the house. Customers never really stopped calling. He did a job and it lasted a long time."

A member of the German-Canadian Congress, the German Society of Winnipeg and the German choir, Kondziela promoted and encouraged the German culture in Winnipeg with passion. To help children learn the story of St. Nicholas, he loved visiting classrooms in character and never hesitated to jump at opportunities to bring cultural stories to life.

Fiercely dedicated to his family, his community and his home — both in Germany, where he was born and raised, and in Canada, his adopted country — Kondziela took great pride in all of it.

He died at age 93 on April 1, 2024. Kondziela enjoyed a happy childhood in his birthplace of Silesia, Germany, before his family was forced to leave home during the Second World War. When Kondziela arrived in Canada, he was a creative journeyman specializing in carpentry.

In his early 20s, he was ready to give his all to his new home. He met Aurise Smith, a small-town girl from Ste. Anne, and in 1956 the couple began what would evolve into a happy 67-year marriage, welcoming a daughter and a son, sharing values and the love of travel, dance, music and home.

"They were very different, but they still complemented each other," said his daughter Monique.

"Through their faith they met at St. Mary's Cathedral, downtown. Dad being very proud of his family and accomplishments, he was extremely proud of my mother, his home, his family — they fit each other. My dad was very protective of her, always attuned to where she was and what she was doing. He was like that until the very end," she said, adding that their closeness led to a happy childhood, for which she will always be grateful.

In 1960 the couple moved into their St. Vital home, which would become

the heart of their family for decades ahead.

"He was attached to and protective of his home. He was extremely proud of his house — he put a lot of love into it. He lost his home during the Second World War and he never wanted to lose another home. When you lose everything in war it really does something to your psyche."

The childhood memories never left him and neither did his interest in planes, trains and automobiles, for which he had a lifelong fascination.

"He was a real connoisseur of World War II," said his daughter. "To the end of his days, whenever there was a plane going by, he'd watch it going right across the sky."

In 1994, the family did a road trip through Germany on what's called the Romantic Road, winding through enchanting gingerbread towns, a meaningful homecoming for Kondziela.

"We visited the home where my dad grew up, which is now a part of Poland. The current owners of the house let us in. My dad looked at every inch. I was absolutely thrilled for him, to watch his excitement. He was literally crawling everywhere," Monique said, adding that her father returned to Germany on his own three four more times.

"When you leave a country and settle in another, I don't think you really lose your roots and love for that country. I found that with my father his love for Germany grew."

Kondziela similarly put all he had, his love, into his Canadian home, with its additions and renovations, and the vegetable and flower gardens. A man of dreams, imagination and determination, he brought charm to all of his projects.

"He was an avid gardener," said Monique. "I can still taste the tomatoes and yellow beans. He couldn't wait to get into the garden. It was his happy place. There were bushes of peonies all along the backyard — he would often cut roses and peonies and bring them in for my mom."

WHEN he wasn't building or planting, he was determined to celebrate life and special occasions as much as he could while making people laugh.

"He was a real ham," said Monique. "He often couldn't keep a straight face. He'd crack up laughing at his own jokes."

"Our family had a lifetime of surprise birthdays and anniversaries. He celebrated with great fanfare. He enjoyed putting on a show. The world was a stage. That was a big part of who he was."

When the Grey Cup last came to Winnipeg, the longtime football fan found a way to get to hold the cup that nobody else was allowed to touch.

"They had an evening event. Somehow he said that he was 100 years old," explained Monique. "The CFL commissioner heard this, grabbed the Grey Cup and put it in his lap."

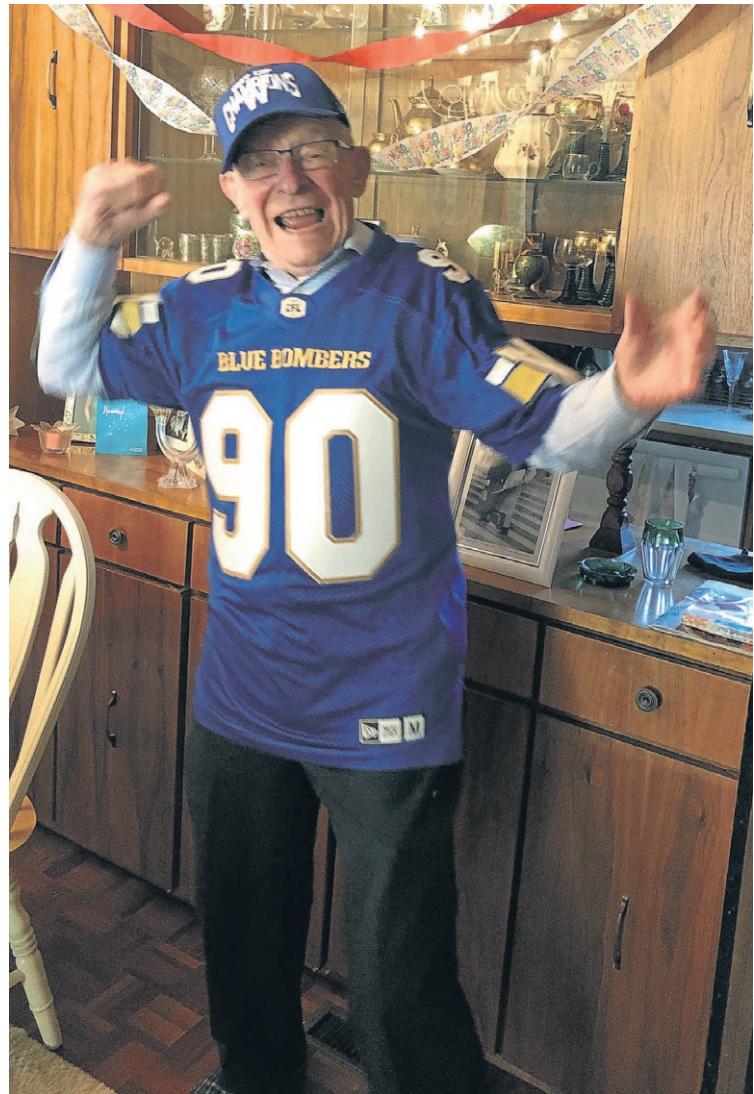
"That cup now has his name engraved on the fan base. Dad got the idea that the VIP event was to celebrate his 100th birthday. When asked on the way home what he thought of the event, he replied, 'There should have been more publicity.'"

Kondziela's legacy also includes quietly helping other newcomers begin life in Canada. At his funeral, a gentleman approached Monique to share how much he appreciated the opportunity given to him by her father.

"He said to me, 'Your dad hired me when nobody was hiring people of my background. I worked with him and learned his trade. I would not be where I am today without your dad.'

"Dad helped many people get a start in life. That was also part of wanting to leave his mark."

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For his 90th birthday, friends sent Hubert Kondziela a personalized Winnipeg Blue Bombers jersey.



The Kondzielas — Paul (from left), Monique, Aurise and Hubert travelled Germany's Romantic Road in 1994, including a stop at the home where Hubert grew up.



Kondziela did nothing in half measures, including his fandom for the Blue Bombers.



Hubert Kondziela 'never really stopped' working, says daughter Monique. Here, he gives tuneup to the windmill at Arbo Flora on St. Anne's Road.



Few can touch the Grey Cup, but Kondziela figured a way to make it happen for himself.