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VILLAGER'S LEGACY: FOSTERING LOVE OF FISHING

by ellin walsh | REPORTER Published: March 29, 2015 12:00AM

Silver Lake -- The thrill of the catch never faded for veteran village fisherman William E. "Bill" Rust.

A familiar fixture on the shores and water of Silver Lake, Mr. Rust died March 5 at 92. Friends and family say Mr. Rust's knowledge of the nuances of the sport was legendary and he lived to share his love of fishing with others.

Richard G. Lubinski knew Mr. Rust for 15 or 20 years. "He moved to Silver Lake primarily for the fishing," according to Lubinski, adding, "He was long considered the best fisherman on the lake, certainly the most knowledgeable."

A former efficiency expert for B.F. Goodrich, for whom he worked 43 years, Mr. Rust "became almost a full-time fisherman" in retirement, Lubinski said. "He'd be down at the lake five, six, seven days a week. And while you and I might go out on the lake for several hours and catch nothing, he'd come back with 10 fish." Mr. Rust loved being on the water in beautiful surroundings, says his daughter Nancy Davies. She moved to Silver Lake from Florida to be her father's companion in his later years.

Born in Cuyahoga Falls to Thomas and Stella Rust, he was orphaned as a boy and raised by his aunt, uncle and grandmother.

Mr. Rust's "passion and ultimate love was fresh water fishing," according to Davies. "From the time he was a boy, he fished. He and his boyhood friend, Leonard, (for whom Bill named his son) would ride their bikes to watering holes and lakes far and wide ... They might be gone for a couple of weeks ... but Bill's aunt always said she knew they were on their way back home, because Towser, Bill's dog, got home first."

Mr. Rust graduated from the University of Akron and was a World War II veteran, having trained Chinese troops in Burma as a member of the United States Army. While there, he made a lifelong friend in a Chinese interpreter.

After the war, he and his wife, Katherine, bought a lot in the village "just so he could fish in Silver Lake," Davies said. A few years later, the couple built the home that they lived in for 50 years. Davies said her father walked Rusty, his beloved Irish Setter, around the village every night, often wearing a fluorescent orange hat and ice fishing suit, depending on the weather.

Mr. Rust served as an adviser on the Silver Lake Estates Board of Trustees for a number of years. Lubinski said the board relied on Mr. Rust for guidance in determining the type and size of fish to stock as well as the timing for doing so. He also spearheaded a Christmas tree recycling program where discarded trees were submerged in Silver Lake to provide hiding places for smaller fish. The process, Lubinski said, was not without hazards. "[When you're] handling trees and cinder blocks in a boat that's kind of wobbly, an occupational hazard is falling in the lake," Lubinski said, adding, "Bill landed in the lake."

Davies said, "I was always known as the fisherman's daughter." Although she learned to clean fish at 6, she doesn't eat them today and never shared her dad's passion for the pastime. But "Silver Lake was a place of pure enjoyment" for her father, Davies said. "He spent countless



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hours out in a boat fishing alone or with his many friends." Mr. Rust was a fixture in the boathouse, too, swapping stories with Jim Tyree, Coach Walker and Cliff Morrison.

In addition to Silver Lake, he tried his luck with a rod and reel in Lake Erie, Florida, South Carolina, Canada, Cuba and Mexico, too.

"... In later years," Davies said, "he would fish off the dock and as long as he was able to fish, life was good. For the past couple of years, he even delighted in feeding the fish ... while sitting at the last picnic table on the far side of the swimming area. Silver Lake was his life."

Near the end of his life, Mr. Rust experienced dizzy spells so instead of fishing from a boat, he'd fish from the wall near the boathouse parking lot. Villager Denny Babb said he and Mr. Rust were long-time friends who enjoyed each other's company as much as the sport of fishing.

"He was a people person, like me, and when we'd get in a boat together, it didn't matter if we caught anything. We always had a good time," Babb says. According to Babb, Mr. Rust was the type of person who never met a stranger or turned down a chance to teach a youngster to fish, ever aware of the importance of passing down that passion to the next generation.

"He loved teaching kids about the wonders and beauty of the great outdoors," Babb says, adding, "He was all heart. As far as fishing, one of the golden rules is if you find a honey hole [a good fishing spot], you don't tell anybody -- you keep it to yourself. But he'd tell everybody -- he was just that way. He knew that lake. He knew it good."

"It won't be the same without him."

Mr. Rust was active with the Summit Sportsman's Association, a former member of the Purple Heart Hunting and Fishing Club and the United Conservation Club of Summit County.

He was preceded in death by his wife of 61 years, Katherine, and son, Leonard of Cuyahoga Falls.

"Bill, I am sure you're in a better place and I hope the fishing is good," Babb wrote in Mr. Rust's online guest book. "Please don't catch them all before I get there, but if you do I will understand."

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