

Neil McLean Duncan passed away “in charge” and peacefully on April 22, 2010. Neil died as he lived, surrounded by those who loved him.

Neil was born in Winnipeg on March 13, 1909 and he lived his 101 years as a proud Canadian who was totally engaged with life.

In a 1981 profile on Neil, the Beater Engineer at Abitibi-Price Provincial Paper, it stated “Meet Neil Duncan. His accomplishments will sweep you off your feet. Name a sport and Neil Duncan has probably not just played it, he has organized it, coached it, acted as President, supporter and defender. We couldn’t possibly list them all, it would take a book for that, suffice it to say Neil is one of our most involved, most active, best-liked and admired citizens of Thunder Bay. From curling to judging prize-winning gladiolus, he has championed a healthy and active community life. It takes fine citizens to build a fine city. It takes the Neil Duncan’s of this world.”

Neil was passionate about a lot of things. He cherished his family. He loved his friends. He was opinionated about politics and believed in Roberts Rules of Order. He was dedicated to the athletic development of young people and in the right and responsibility of being an active member of a strong community. Neil was a Mason, a gardener, a painter and a scribe.

Neil came to “The Lakehead”, as he called it, in the 30’s where he met and married the love of his life, Beatrice Cooper and together they became the most stylish couple on Duke Street. Neil and “Coop” spent over 40 years as a team and whether in their large garden on Dawson Road, in the home on Marlborough Avenue, in the clubrooms at the Port Arthur Curling Club or preparing flowers for events all over town, they worked together. Neil was a devoted and loving husband who visited Bea daily for over 13 years while she was a resident of Hogarth Westmount Nursing Home.

Neil learned his love of gardening from his parents and he enjoyed some notoriety in the gardening world in his day. A prize gladiolus grower and an accredited national judge, he traveled with prize blooms to competitions throughout central Canada. Neil grew Canadian Championship spikes and in 1973 won the International Gladiolus Championship Award.

The passion for politics never waned. Neil enjoyed everything about politics – the debates, the arguments, the order, and the personalities. He remained interested and involved right up until the end and our City Council Meetings and Question Period have lost an avid and dedicated viewer. It must be noted that Neil was quick to remind everyone that Michael Gravelle was once his paper delivery boy and Neil followed his career closely.

Neil was very proud of his 39 years with Abitibi-Price Provincial Paper in Thunder Bay. He often called himself “A union man.” He felt strongly that the inroads that

were made while he was on the union bargaining team made a positive difference to the lives of papermakers across the province.

Perhaps most notably, Neil will be remembered for his many years of unselfish work for athletics and sport. He was personally dedicated to the development of opportunities for young people in sport. Neil's Life Membership at the Port Arthur Curling Club and in the Northern Ontario Curling Association are representative of a lifetime love of the great game of curling and decades of volunteer hours. A strong advocate for junior curling, Neil was proud to serve as the Northwestern Ontario Representative to the Canadian Junior Curling Association which allowed him the opportunity to travel with the Northern Ontario Junior Championship teams to national playdowns all across the country. Neil brought his enthusiasm and vigor to youth soccer as well as track and field where he coached, officiated, organized and worked tirelessly for young athletes. In 1993, Neil was inducted into the Northwestern Ontario Sports Hall of Fame as a Builder. It was his proudest moment.

For all who knew him, he was a tough organizer who liked things to run smoothly and was quite famous for getting everyone to follow his rules. From the 1960 Macdonald Tankard Brier to the long-running tenure as Commissioner of both the Mens' and Womens' Major Curling Leagues, to executive positions and event organization – both large and small, Neil understood about ownership and accountability and he expected that hard work would equal success. Those successes were evident in his "Trophy Room" which displayed the triumphs, teams, awards, and recognition of peers and community -- it was fun and he cherished each photograph, newspaper clipping, scroll and certificate.

Neil will be remembered for his distinctive, delightful and well-used laugh.

Neil is survived by his family, Bea and Lawrie Cherniack, Katie Cherniack and Grant Prairie of Winnipeg, and Jenny Cherniack of Montreal. Neil was predeceased by his wife, Beatrice (Cooper) Duncan, his brother Robert Duncan, his mother Polly and his father Bob Duncan.

The family and friends would like to thank the exceptional people of Hogarth Riverview, Spruce Court for their infinite kindness and care.

As in keeping with Neil's personal wishes, there will be no memorial service. If you wish, please make a donation to the Port Arthur Curling Club Junior Program or a charity of your choice.