

Robert Schneider Memorial Scholarship



Robert grew up on his grandfather's and father's farm in Poland; he loved that life, but World War II came and at 16 he was forced to leave his home and family. During that time, he didn't know if his family lived or died and where they were. But three years later, he found them again after hopping aboard a coal train, riding all night and searching for them with only a picture of his sister. Dad's faith and determination reunited him with his family that he loved so much. But there was no going back to their family home; the family decided their best hope for a new life was in America. He had to leave everyone he loved again, to come to Westfield in 1952 at the age of 24, to come to a place where he didn't even speak the language.

In Westfield at that time, work for an immigrant who didn't speak English was at HB Smith making cast iron boilers. He started as a laborer and worked hard, did his best, eventually becoming the smelter operator that the whole factory depended upon to make the iron for each day's castings. He started work at 4:30 or 5 am, worked 10-12 hours per day, never missed work or was late—the factory couldn't work without him first making the iron. He never complained and took pride in what he did and what he helped make. Through his efforts he was able to bring his parents and sisters to Westfield, where they were able to build new lives.

Robert married his life partner, Edna in 1955, lived and raised a family in Westfield until his passing in 2019, celebrating 64 years of marriage. He and Edna lived their lives focused upon faith, family and fellowship; he was a lifelong member and actively involved at St. John's Lutheran Church in Westfield. They both became naturalized American citizens and took pride in being part of America, often saying they lived in the best country in the world.

Robert embodied "Servant Leadership" before the term was invented. He worked to fulfill the needs of others as best he could, lived his whole life with a strong belief in God, an abiding love for his family, and a strong desire to do the right thing. He put his family, his loved ones and his community first. A passage from 2 Timothy 4:7: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith". That was Robert's life.

Robert had a strong commitment to education and saw that as a means to achieve a better life. Although his formal education ended after the 6th grade, he never stopped learning from his daily experiences and probably had more accumulated knowledge and common sense than many people. He and Edna constantly encouraged both education and hard work and happily paid for their son's entire college education. Later on, they were strong advocates for their grandchildren's educations. Their proudest moments were attending the high school and college graduations of their loved ones.

Through this scholarship, the Schneider Family hopes to provide the same opportunities that Robert provided to his family: a chance for a better life, a chance to become a Servant Leader and to make a difference in other people's lives.

Written by: Rick & Lea Schneider January 16, 2021