

1987 Telegraph Herald First Citizen Award

Arnold Honkamp

Just two years removed from sharing Telegraph Herald First Citizen Award honors with fellow members of the Dubuque Racing Association, whose successful opening of a pari-mutuel greyhound track keyed an economic and psychological turnaround in the community, Arnold Honkamp received the 1987 award in his own right.

Honkamp's selection for the 18th annual award had nothing to do with Dubuque Greyhound Park but, like the dog track initiative, had everything to do with the community.

In the spring of 1987, the only commercial airline serving Dubuque Municipal Airport, United Express, terminated local service.

A business owner, civic leader, private pilot and Dubuque Airport Commission chair, Honkamp immediately recognized the stakes. Losing an airline connection between Dubuque and Chicago O'Hare would be devastating for the community — especially as it involved business travel. Lacking convenient air service makes keeping and attracting employers that much more difficult, and that could negatively ripple through the wider workforce.

Honkamp took the yoke and piloted the "SOS" campaign. While the name of the initiative reflected a distress call, it stood for "Save O'Hare Service" and, alternatively, "Save Our Slots," referring to the number of flights earmarked for O'Hare.

As he had as one of three major leaders of the racing association, Honkamp, who described himself as goal-oriented, poured himself into the goal seeing that Dubuque landed another airline before United Express pulled out.

The tireless work of Honkamp (1939-2014) and campaign associates paid off. In September 1987, American



Eagle began flying between Dubuque and O'Hare.

"I really respect that guy," the city manager at the time, Ken Gearhart, told the TH. "If you want something done, you get Arnie on the team, because it's going to get done."

Added Dave Clemens,

friend and fellow leader of the racing association, "If we had a few more Arnie Honkamps in Dubuque, we wouldn't be worried about getting things done."

That certainly would not have been the consensus during Honkamp's growing-up

years in his native Dubuque. In a 2006 interview with the TH, he confessed to being "a very mischievous child all the way through high school and college." He shared several examples to support his summation that he and his co-conspirators "raised a lot of proverbial hell."

After college graduation and a couple of years of marriage, Honkamp settled down. His checkered past might have fueled his drive to be a positive force in his community. Whatever his motivation, he made a difference.

Besides the dog track and airline campaign — he later said it was another "project and an undertaking that was very difficult and time-consuming" — Honkamp, co-owner of Honkamp Krueger Financial Services, volunteered in many and varied capacities.

Though his leadership on the airline campaign was the basis for his First Citizen selection in 1987, his community involvement and leadership in other areas might well have netted him such recognition.

Honkamp was an advocate for early childhood education, board member for several civic endeavors, board chair of the Dubuque Area Chamber of Commerce, United Way volunteer, finance resource and advocate for local Catholic schools and, as a younger man, chair of many Dubuque Jaycees projects.

In 2006, when asked by the TH about his plans in



On Jan. 1, 2020, the Telegraph Herald will unveil the recipient of the 50th First Citizen Award. To celebrate this milestone in the making, we'll count down all 50 award recipients from 1970 on, culminating with the 2019 winner to be announced on New Year's Day.

retirement — it started in 2009, but colleagues noted that he was a regular presence in the office — Honkamp expressed his intention to focus on early childhood education and, time permitting, "be a continued part of my activities in giving back to this wonderful community that's been so good to me."

That service to the community was cut short in the first days of 2014, when he suddenly took ill and died at age 74. He was survived by wife, Joyce, and three children. He was preceded in death by a daughter, Heidi Anne Honkamp-Myhre, whose 1990s battle against cancer prompted her father to shave his head the rest of his days.

Joyce said he often repeated his favorite part of the Jaycees creed. "It says, 'Service to humanity is the best work of life,' and he lived by that," she told the TH. "That's why he got involved in so many things. He loved the city of Dubuque, and he knew no bounds in his efforts to improve it."