

# John Pytlak: Academy Award winner, family man

*The Penfield resident, whose work at Eastman Kodak Co. earned him honors in Hollywood, died Aug. 17.*

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John Pytlak may have been the only Penfield resident to win an Academy Award.

In 2001, he and his daughters traveled to Hollywood, where Mr. Pytlak was presented with a Technical Achievement Award by actress Renee Zellweger for his work on the Lighting Aim Density system, which helped laboratories improve color in their pictures.

Mr. Pytlak was also named the winner of the 2003 Environmental Protection Agency's Stratospheric Ozone Protection Award for helping develop the particle transfer roller, which cleans films without using solvents.

"He was very well known in the motion picture industry, both internally to Kodak as well as externally," said Frank Petrone, manager of Kodak's Rochester Technical Center. "A lot of his contributions made it to find their use in applications in motion picture production throughout the world."

Family never took a back seat to his career, though.

"My dad was always a lot of fun," said Annie Pytlak. "He always helped us out. ... We had a lot of fun in the summer in the pool and when we traveled. He was just easy going and a great person to know. As I got older, he was there to



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► **PYTLAK**, from page 1A

offer advice."

His other daughter, Katie Spillman, said the house is covered with their father's photography.

"There is literally probably two photo albums for every year of my life," she said. "Dad was constantly taking pictures."

Mr. Pytlak died Aug. 17, 2007, at the age of 59 after a courageous battle with cancer. A Penfield resident for more than 30 years, Mr. Pytlak was born in Buffalo on July 15, 1948. He was raised in Angola, N.Y., where he was valedictorian of his high school class. Mr. Pytlak attended the University of Buffalo for electrical engineering, but he harbored a deep love of photography, movies and the environment.

"He was a well-rounded man," said daughter Annie Pytlak.

Spillman said her father loved to tinker with things from a young age. As a college student, he worked part time at the drive-in theater in Angola. It was there he developed a transmitter that allowed people at the drive-in to listen to

the movie through their car radio.

He landed a job with Kodak right out of college. Mr. Pytlak got to travel the world with Kodak. After he retired, he got involved with forums on the Internet, answering questions for those in the industry. When he fell ill, Spillman said, the family began receiving cards from people all over the world.

"I was amazed at the outpouring of support from people he'd never met, but only worked with online to solve film problems," Spillman said. "I think he just enjoyed talking with people who shared his passion, but he also had a lot of technical knowledge."

Mr. Pytlak was also an avid gardener.

"He was known as 'Farmer Pytlak' because he would produce more vegetables than our family could eat," she said. "He would walk around the neighborhood with a box full of produce. ... I think Dad felt a real connection to the earth."

An advocate of film preservation, Mr. Pytlak was very involved with the George Eastman House and often gave lectures there.

Mr. Pytlak's neighbor Louie

Masi described him as someone who paid a lot of attention to detail.

"He was passive, but not a pushover," said Masi. "He was soft-spoken, but got his point across. He was a kind and gentle person, he was also extremely accomplished. He had a way of making things happen for himself."

Friends and family describe Mr. Pytlak as an optimist and a man of faith, even when he was diagnosed with inoperable intestinal cancer in September 2006. By January 2007, he was unable to eat solid foods. By May, he was on a liquid diet. Still, Spillman said, he fought the disease and lived to see his first grandson born.

"It was remarkable to watch my dad get to be a grandfather," she said.

When Mr. Pytlak fell ill, his neighbors banded together to create Pytlak's People Partners. Friends and neighbors volunteered to help the family with rides to medical appointments, shopping and other daily errands.

"We had so many people volunteer, we had enough people to go six months without repeating the list," said

Masi.

Neighbor Michael Maiorino said Mr. Pytlak left an impression on those who volunteered to help and all those he met.

"He was a class act all the way through," he said, "in the way he lived and the way he died."

Mr. Pytlak is survived by his wife Elizabeth; daughters, Katie (Jim) Spillman and Anne Pytlak; grandson Benjamin John Spillman; sister Adrienne (Stanley) Ziemba and brother Frank (Pamela) Pytlak; and many nieces and nephews, cousins, colleagues and dear friends.

Mr. Pytlak offered his body to the University of Rochester anatomical gift program. In lieu of flowers, memorials may be made to the George Eastman House, 900 East Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14607; the Church of St. Jerome, 207 S. Garfield St., East Rochester, N.Y. 14445; Rochester General Hospital Foundation, c/o Heart Institute, 1299 Portland Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14621, or Rochester General Hospital Foundation, c/o Lipson Cancer Center, 1299 Portland Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14621.