

Altoona Mirror

Benjamin Harris Root

Benjamin Harris Root, 96, died Friday, Jan. 29, 2016, in Pittsburgh, after spending his life making the world a better place.

Surviving are four children: Stephen (Louise) Root of Pittsburgh, Paula Pimentel of Sedona, Ariz., Maxine (Ray) Butler of Kent, Ohio, and Dan (Sue) Root of Alexandria, Va.; eight grandchildren; six great-grandchildren; and a wonderful companion, Edna Belle Kalson of Pittsburgh.

He was preceded in death by his beloved wife of 54 years, Cheryl Charlson Root; and a loving companion, Mary Ann Fluck of Boise, Idaho.

Root was born in the Bronx, N.Y., in 1919 and graduated from Nutley High School, N.J., after relocating several times with his family, who owned Jewish delicatessens. Moving frequently as a child helped him develop into a man who made friends anywhere he went – Indonesia, Liberia, Russia, Mexico and across town. He graduated from North Carolina State University in 1941 and spent five years working as a U.S. Department of Agriculture inspector, a chemist and a medical school student before marrying Cheryl and relocating to her hometown of Barnesboro in 1945.

In 1946, the young couple took over the furniture store that had been founded by Cheryl's parents in 1907, Charlsons Wonderful World of Furniture. Eventually, they expanded it to a 15,000-square-foot pillar of Barnesboro's downtown. From 1946-99, they proudly served Cambria County and the surrounding area with personalized service and an inventory stocked with furniture that the Roots often acquired on their annual trips to international trade shows in High Point, N.C., Atlanta, Ga., and elsewhere.

To some, Root was known as a businessman. To others, he was a community leader – a founding board member of the Cambria County Community College from 1993-99, co-founder of the Barnesboro Public Library and the co-founder of the Coal County Medical Center.

To those who knew him best, he was a family man above all. Root was the devoted patriarch of a family that included four children, eight grandchildren, six great-grandchildren; his extended family ranged from Argentina to Japan. He enjoyed nothing more than visiting with his loved ones, hearing stories about them and doting on them. In his later years, phone calls with family provided pride and joy on a daily basis.

Six-day work weeks at Charlsons Furniture were interspersed with time spent traveling to more than 40 countries, riding the horses he kept for decades or visiting with family. He was also passionate about bettering the coal-mining community that he called home.

Root was a charter member and founding president of Barnesboro Business District Authority, was the co-founder of Coalition for Better Healthcare, Tricare Area, and spent 20 years on the board of the Southern Alleghenies Museum of Art, the nation's longest-running museum satellite system with four locations in western Pennsylvania. He and Cheryl were longtime supporters of B'Nai Israel Synagogue, Barnesboro, which her father had founded. Root also spearheaded a three-year consolidation

effort that resulted in the Jan. 1, 2000, formation of the town of Northern Cambria as the merger of Barnesboro and neighboring Spangler.

Root was honored in many ways throughout his life: In 1986, he won a Cambria County Conservation Award, he was a 2002 inductee into the Cambria County Business Hall of Fame and he was a member of the Northern Cambria Hall of Fame, Class of 2013.

However, to him, there was no greater honor than the opportunity to spend time with his family, whom he cherished, nurtured and uplifted throughout all of his days. At the time of his passing, he was being visited, comforted and cared for by his family and the staff of Weinberg Village, a personal care facility in Pittsburgh.

Root led a remarkable life in which he made friends, made memories and made an impact in the community but also in his travels around the world. He left an impression on everyone who he met with his combination of deep intelligence, irrepressible charm, unfailing kindness and youthful sense of humor. He leaves behind a towering legacy of love and inspiration.

A memorial service will be held at 1 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 28, 2016, at the Residence at Weinberg Village, Pittsburgh.

Donations may be made to the Music and Wellness Program at the Jewish Association on Aging, 200 JHF Drive, Pittsburgh, PA 15217, or online at jaapgh.org.
