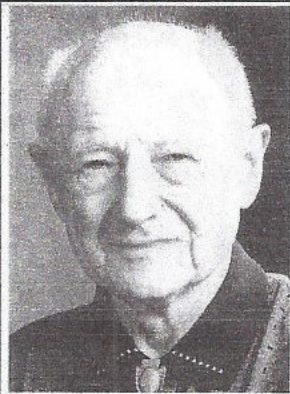


# Obituaries

KA 4/15



**HANKA, DR. LADISLAV  
"LAD"**

Dr. Ladislav "Lad" Hanka, of Kalamazoo, Michigan, passed away Monday, March 26, 2018 at 97 years of age.

Dr. Hanka was born on July 29, 1920, in the village of Mnetice, Czechoslovakia to Ladislav and Marie (Borovcova) Hanka. He loved natural history and studied well, receiving a coveted scholarship from the Hlavka Foundation to attend Charles University in Prague. He took pride in having qualified for the honor, and spent much of his life repaying the trust. As a result of his education, he was able to contribute to society and later to provide financial support to the foundation. Dr. Hanka's university studies were, however, complicated by the closure of Czech universities in 1939 by the invading Nazis. He spent the war years working with horses rather than books. Resistance activities took the place of youthful pursuits. When the universities reopened in 1945, he returned to his agricultural studies – first in Prague and later in Denmark.

On March 29, 1948 he married Eva Frantiska (Frances) Neugebauerova of Zdar nad Sazavou, Czechoslovakia. Peace was short-lived for the newlyweds. By 1948 their homeland had been abandoned by the victorious allies to its fate in the soviet sphere of influence, as the world went into cold war standoff. They fled in 1950 from the tiny resort town of Srni in the Sumava region of Czechoslovakia. Ostensibly out mushrooming, they left with little more than

their first blessed American Thanksgiving at mid-Atlantic in a howling gale amid waves the size of apartment blocks. Nobody could actually eat the beautiful turkey dinner they were being served. They were, however, soon looking at the port of New York and being greeted by the Salvation Army with coffee and donuts. That first American welcome was deeply reassuring, and the Hankas have donated to the Salvation Army ever since. The young refugee couple boarded a Greyhound Bus for Iowa, where they met their sponsors, settled, and started a family. In 1957, they became naturalized US citizens.

In Iowa, Dr. Hanka had immediate work, thanks to his expertise with breeding dairy-cattle and the newest Danish practices of artificial insemination. Still, he soon left agriculture to earn a Ph.D. in bacteriology from Iowa State University. In 1958, Dr. Hanka accepted employment at The Upjohn Company and moved his young family to Kalamazoo. For three decades he conducted pharmaceutical research, beginning as a microbiologist looking for new antibiotics and eventually ending up a senior scientist conducting cancer research as a biochemist. Dr. Hanka gained recognition for his contributions to assaying methodologies used in isolating promising strains of microbes and especially soil fungi and was often invited to speak at international cancer symposia and microbiology conferences. His name ultimately appeared on 42 pharmaceutical patents and in his retirement years he had the satisfaction of seeing one of his discoveries (Vidaza) marketed by Pharmion (Celgene today) as a breakthrough drug for treatment of myelodysplastic syndrome. Knowing that his work had saved lives decades after its initial discovery and that its clinical use would survive him provided Dr. Hanka profound satisfaction.

Dr. Hanka's microbiological expertise had its curious

well. And so he was generous with his help to see that come about.

Having prevailed against great odds in completing his university education in English – his sixth language (and acquired only in adulthood), Dr. Hanka turned to educational philanthropy in his later years. That began early on with repaying his loans to the Matice Vyssho Vzdelani (Council of Higher Education), a Czech exile endowment providing interest-free educational loans and then continued as he made a point of continuing support, that others might benefit as he had. Dr. Hanka then helped several Czech students to study in America. The Hankas opened their home and their hearts to these young people far from home, helping them with contacts, money, and home cooking. Together they established the Nadaci Evy Hankove, rozene Neugebauerove (The foundation of Eva Hanka – born Neugebauerova) at the Gymnazium (Middle School) in her hometown of Zdar nad Sazavou.

Despite his own delayed entry into the professional workforce, he was committed to sending money to family behind the Iron Curtain, and to saving for his children's education. He assured that they completed their university studies with full family support, and went on to encourage his grandchildren in their education.

One of Dr. Hanka's great gifts to his children, grandchildren and local youth was sharing his lifelong passion for the outdoors, including hunting, fishing and foraging. While his children were growing up, he was active with the Boy Scouts, serving as an outdoor leader for his son's Scout Troop 57. Sunday walks in Kellogg's forest were a family tradition, especially in search of mushrooms. Many of the snow drops (snezhenky in Czech) that you'll see today, growing around Kalamazoo County are the legacy of his Johnny Appleseed-like activity, leaving plantings behind



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The Hankas lived first as displaced persons at Valka Lager (Camp) near Nurnberg-Langwasser (Germany) and then, finding work with The UN International Refugee Relief and Resettlement Agency, they moved to Frankfurt. Eventually they secured a sponsor and passage to the United States. Shipping out onboard the war-damaged navy transport USS Hershey, they celebrated

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Dr. Hanka's microbiological expertise had its curious fruition within Kalamazoo, in helping to re-establish the now-flourishing microbrewery movement. When the young Larry Bell sought backers to help found the first local post-prohibition brewery, it began with the help of Paul Todd Jr., ranger Bob Cull and several Upjohn scientists, who all reached deep into their pockets and also contributed significant industrial and technical expertise. In Dr. Hanka's case it was his extensive knowledge of pharmaceutical-grade, industrial fermentation biology and propagation of yeast strains that proved important and occasionally even saved the day. He loved the idea of locally grown food and was an avid supporter of our local bakeries, wineries, breweries, farmer's markets and you-pick orchards. This was the Czech immigrant in him, rebelling against the soulless and tasteless industrially processed food he encountered in postwar America, after having grown up with locally made, organic and whole foods and wanting to see that wholesome legacy recaptured in his adoptive homeland as

at the Gymnazium (Middle School) in her hometown of Zdar nad Sazavou.

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We join his many friends at Trout Unlimited in imagining that he is contentedly wetting a line in some celestial trout stream.

Dr. Hanka is survived by his wife, Eva Frances Hanka, his son, Ladislav Richard Hanka and his wife Jana (Bartikova) Hanka, all of Kalamazoo; his daughter Janet Hanka McLemore and her husband Kevin McLemore of Ambler, Pa; grandsons Clayton McLemore of Ambler, Pa and Charles McLemore of Boulder, Co. He was preceded in death by his parents, and his sister Marie Danes of Tacoma/Olympia, Wa.

A memorial service will be held at 11 AM Saturday, April 21st First Presbyterian Church, 321 W South St, Kalamazoo, MI 49007, with reception to follow. Interment will be private.