

News veteran Eddie Edgar dies at 88



Throwing out the first pitch was Eddie's honor down at Tiger stadium in 1982.

The Stroller is gone. Wilson William "Eddie" Edgar, 88, a journalist whose name was synonymous with Detroit-area sporting events for half a century and a reporter and fixture of suburban journalism for 70 years died Sunday afternoon in St. Mary's Hospital, in Livonia.

He had been hospitalized since April 30. He died of heart failure and complications from surgery, according to Sister Mary Modesta, president of St. Mary's Hospital.

Working for the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers for the past 22 years, Edgar was best known for his column, The Stroller, in which he made observations about the suburban scene. He also served as a reporter and editor at the newspaper.

HIS WAS so well known that when calling news sources, he identified himself only as "Eddie from the paper."

Before coming to the O&E, he worked at the Detroit Free Press, including a stint as sports editor. He left the Free Press in 1946 to become executive secretary of the Detroit Bowling Proprietors Association

and to organize a state bowling association.

A 46-year resident of Livonia, he played a leading role in that city's incorporation in 1950 and was the vice president of the first Livonia City Council.

He also was a longstanding member of the Plymouth Rotary, where he was honored in 1976 as the "Ironman of Journalism."

"Eddie not only helped make the Observer and Eccentric Newspapers what they are today," said O&E chairman Philip Power, "but he also helped make the suburbs what they are today. I can think of nobody who combines personal drive, journalistic verve and civic involvement in the way that Eddie did."

Edgar was among those instrumental in initiating the "sister city" exchange with Plymouth, England, and has been a major fixture since in keeping alive that relationship.

In 1977, the city of Livonia renamed its sports arena after Edgar. He was honored as Livonia's First Citizen in 1978.

"WE ALL will miss Eddie. For years we've been treated to his sto-

ries of sports legends," said managing editor Steve Barnaby.

"A much younger staff always was amazed at Eddie's energy and determination to remain an active reporter. He truly is to be admired," said Barnaby.

After suffering a heart attack earlier this year, Edgar returned to work just days later and wrote a column about his experience.

Edgar decided on retirement only last month. He was the oldest working journalist in the state.

Learning from his doctors that he only had a short time to live, Eddie told his colleagues, "I just want to go home and spend a little time in my garden. I've got a beautiful place, you know."

A member of the Michigan Amateur Sports Hall of Fame, the Michigan Media Hall of Fame and the Detroit Bowling Hall of Fame, Edgar for many years covered and developed friendships with prominent state and national sports figures.

For years, Edgar took to the luncheon and dinner circuits telling stories about Heavyweight Boxing champion Joe Louis and boat racing champion Gar Wood.

"A conversation with Eddie over a cup of coffee would easily mean a story about one of many sports greats — Ty Cobb, Mickey Cochrane, Schoolboy Rowe, Knute Rockne," said O&E photographer Art Emanuele, a close friend of Edgar's.

Emanuele noted that Edgar and him had met for years in the cafeteria calling themselves the 9:14 club, "because we always met at 9:14 in the morning."

EDGAR WAS especially proud of his Tiger baseball opening day record. This year he marked his 63rd consecutive Tiger opener.

But Edgar admitted that his very first Tiger opener was his biggest thrill.

In a recent column he recalled that chilly afternoon when "this round disciple of Pennsylvania Dutch heritage climbed the ladder and crossed on a cat walk to his place in the Tigers press box for the first time."

"Never can he forget his first swing of the immortal Ty Cobb swinging three bats as he walked to the plate for his first time at bat."

"Oh, there has been many a thrilling moment while seated high up in the press box. But thrilling as they were, none ever will match the joyous and almost unbelievable thrill he had on his first trip to this seventh heaven of sports writers."

FOR MORE than 20 years he broadcast bowling matches over radio station WJR. He is generally credited with making bowling a popular sport in the Detroit area.

In 1926, he became a reporter with the Catusqueus Dispatch in Pennsylvania. He moved to Allen, Pa., the next year.

His 1924 move to the Free Press

took place because of a misunderstanding during a conversation with poet and Free Press employee, Edgar Guest, who was visiting Allentown.

"Try the Free Press," Guest told him, meaning try reading the paper. Edgar thought Guest was telling him to apply for a job.

Guest found Edgar sitting on the steps of the Free Press when he returned to Detroit. He stayed with the Free Press for 25 years.

Edgar became a Livonia resident in 1938 when the community was still a township with 8,000 residents. Besides serving as a charter commissioner, he helped develop the Livonia Chamber of Commerce, St. Mary Hospital and Madonna College.

Although forced to leave high school before graduating because of his father's death, Edgar received an honorary diploma from Garden City West High School in 1973. In 1982 he received an honorary associate of arts degree from Schoolcraft College.

In 1979 Edgar and his wife, Leona, were made honorary citizens of Plymouth. Edgar married Leona in 1928. They have lived on Grove Street in Livonia for the last 48 years.

Funeral services will be at 1 p.m. Thursday in Schrader Funeral Home in downtown Plymouth and St. Matthew United Methodist Church in Livonia. Friends may visit from 7-9 p.m. Monday and from 3-5 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday. A Masonic tribute is scheduled at 8 p.m. Wednesday. Burial will be in Parkview Cemetery in Livonia.

Memorial contributions may be sent to the new intensive care unit at St. Mary Hospital, 36475 Five Mile, Livonia, Mich. 48150.

Edgar is survived by his wife.



Eddie's fondest memory was of the first Detroit Tiger opening day he covered 63 years ago.



In 1982 Eddie was recognized by Schoolcraft College with an honorary degree. Congratulating him at the ceremony was C. Nelson Grote, former college president.



Leona, Eddie's wife of nearly 56 years, was always there to share the joy and happiness.



A young Wilson W. "Eddie" Edgar came to Detroit from Pennsylvania in 1924 to begin work at the Detroit Free Press. In 1924, at the age of 67, he joined the Observer Newspapers.



Joe Louis, Detroit's "Brown Bomber," one of the greatest heavyweight fighters, had great help along the way from one of his "discoverers" and closest advisors, Eddie Edgar.



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