

## The Steve L. Toth and Donna M. Toth Family Fund Scholarship

In a community that values agriculture so much, there have to be individuals who care enough to do the hard work of planting and harvesting. Not only was Steve L. Toth willing to be that person, but he loved the job.

He and his wife, Donna, farmed roughly 650 acres in northern Starke County and southern LaPorte County and owned approximately 437 acres. Farming was one of

Steve's greatest loves, and he could often be

found working to keep his older equipment in perfect condition. One of his prized tractors was one 1947 Farmall that he received from his father, a Hungarian immigrant and lifelong successful farmer.



Donna and Steve Toth

"Steve was known throughout the area for his particular ways in running the farm," Donna said. "Several farmers told me during my time of grief how they admired Steve."

Born on October 18, 1947, Steve lived most of his life in the northern Starke County area, graduating from Hamlet High School in 1965 and taking over two of his father's farms while working full time as an electrician and district machine operator at NIPSCO. Donna was born in Phoenix but moved to the Starke County area when she was two years old. She graduated from Knox High School in 1962 and went on to attend Michiana College of Commerce where she obtained a business degree. She attended Ancilla College throughout the seventies while raising her children. Steve and Donna were both very shy and were quite the opposite of each other in some ways.

"He was Catholic, and I was Protestant; he was a Democrat, and I was Republican, and he had dark hair and I had blonde," said Donna. "We would always joke about our differences."

They quickly put their political differences aside, however, and were married in 1965. They had two children, Donald and Stefanie, and some of Donna's favorite family memories are of the yearly trips they took. Each year Steve would use vacation time that he received from NIPSCO, where he worked for thirty-two years before retiring in 2002, to take the family on trips all around the United States. Donna and Steve loved the trips they took, most notably to Cheyenne, New Orleans, the Great Smokey Mountains, the East Coast, Maine and across to Nova Scotia. Through all of these fun times, they shared laughter together that showed the love they had for each other.

"We'd lie in bed at night and share our day experiences with each other, and laugh over things, and the kids would yell at us and say 'Quiet! We can't sleep!' We had such a wonderful life," Donna said.

While Steve was dedicated to being an outstanding farmer and top-notch employee at NIPSCO, Donna was busy doing various jobs and activities around the community. She was Secretary to the Superintendent of Schools at Knox Community School Corporation for 21 years, drove a school bus for 18 years; served on the Starke County Library board for thirteen years, and the 4-H board; was a member and officers of the Starke County Purdue Extension Homemakers Association for over forty years; and was active in the Knox United Methodist Church. Donna still serves on the Starke County Community Foundation Services Committee and the Starke County Historical Society Board since 2008.



Donna with her grandchildren in 2015.

Through all of these activities, they both found ample time to be with their two children and their three grandchildren, Devon, Delilah, and Grant. The life they were living was close to paradise for both of them, and Steve could not have been happier. "The day he died he told me, 'Donna, I am so proud of what you and I have done. I love what I am doing and consider myself one of the luckiest men in the world to be able to enjoy what I love,'" Donna said.

Steve tragically passed away in an accident with a U.S. Army vehicle in 2008. Shortly after, Donna decided to create a scholarship fund in his memory. With help from her family and the Community Foundation, the Steve L. Toth and Donna M. Toth Family Fund Scholarship was created in 2010. The scholarship goes to graduates of Oregon-Davis High School who have at least a 3.0 GPA and are not in the top 5% of their graduating class. Through this scholarship, Steve's memory will live on forever, and he and his family will continue to help their community.

"I want to give my scholarship to the student who has academic goals and good character," Donna said. "Steve and I always had a deep feeling of sharing our blessings."