

KENNETH R. PEAKER (1932-2010)



Even fighting the effects of skin cancer, Dr. Ken Peaker kept coming into work. If asked how he was feeling, he'd always say "Life is peachy".

Ken Peaker died on June 27, 2010, at the Oakville Trafalgar Hospital. He was 77. Ken was one of Bill Trow's first partners at Trow Associates. He would go on to form two other geotechnical consulting firms fairly late in life - Shaheen & Peaker Limited, and just two years ago – SPL Consultants Limited. Ken had a rare combination of technical acumen and keen business sense.

He had a humble start. Only five when his mother died of cancer, he and his brother Gary grew up in a prairie foster home until they were almost teenagers, when his father remarried and reunited his family. They lived without indoor plumbing or electricity in Riverton, Manitoba until Peaker left for the University of Manitoba, having put himself through school on the avails of trapping, fishing and a firewood business. Ken was fortunate to be awarded an Athlone Fellowship for post-graduate studies at Imperial College in London, an award that would change his life in many ways, the most important of which was meeting his future wife Lorna. Ken and Lorna were married in Manchester, England in 1961.

Following his DIC in 1956 at Imperial, he went on to study with the late Professor Peter W. Rowe at the University of Manchester, where he received his Ph.D. in 1964. Rowe and Peaker's work on passive earth pressures resulted in a change in the British Civil Engineering Code of Practice in retaining wall design. Ken and school chum Don Shields invented the first porous plastic piezometer, which they fabricated in their spare time between repairing motorcycles and studying.

Active in consulting in Ontario, the Caribbean and Middle East over his 45 year career, Ken advanced the practical application of geotechnics on many landmark projects, including Ontario Place, Scotia Plaza, Metro Convention Centre, Ontario College of Art, Ground Zero, to name a few.

Much of Ken's involvement with the Canadian Geotechnical Society (CGS) was with the Canadian Geotechnical Society - Southern Ontario Section (CGS-SOS) group in Toronto. He was the Chairman of the CGS-SOS for two terms, in 1992-1993 and 1993-1994. For his contributions to the CGS-SOS over many years he was presented with the CGS-SOS AWARD in 2008. Ken was also awarded a Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada

(FEIC) in recognition of excellence in engineering practice and exceptional contributions to the well-being of the profession and to the good of society.

Despite his unwavering resolve in business, Ken was deep down, a shy and unassuming individual who was more comfortable on his weekend farm with the family, than in the boardroom - though he excelled at both. Ken and Lorna have three children and seven grandchildren. When cancer meant he had an ear removed, he told a grandson he'd lost it in a pirate fight. When he was hospitalized in the last couple of months of his life, he never lost his interest in the technical aspects of his work.

Ken was a great husband, father, grandfather, engineer, employer and friend. He will be missed by all those that had the good fortune to meet him.