



Irma Johnson

May 3, 1914 - August 24, 2010

Irma Lydia Johnson, A well-known long time resident of Dickinson County, has died at age 96, at Victoria Pines Estates in Iron Mountain.

She was born of Finnish immigrant parents, the late Karl and Ida Maria (Salakka) Saven, in Eveleth, Minn. on May 3, 1914. The family soon moved to Massachusetts where her father was involved in farming. As a young girl, Irma helped the family by selling milk and vegetables to neighbors in nearby Garden, Mass., often traveling on foot or using a horse as transportation.

After finishing high school, Irma moved to New York City where she attended Pratt Institute, receiving a bachelor's degree in home economics from that school. In order to support her education, she traveled daily across the city to her work in the household of a wealthy family, returning each night to her studies at Pratt.

After finishing her degree, she was employed by Michigan State to serve as the county extension home economist for Dickinson and Iron counties. She served in that capacity for several years, but then recognized the need for further education and attended Michigan State University where she received a master's degree in extension education. She served as county extension home economist from 1950 until her retirement in 1977. In that capacity, she traveled widely to serve homemakers and youth throughout the region,

encouraging and training them to improve their homemaking skills whereby benefiting their entire families.

Irma had a forceful personality which she used effectively to further social causes in which she strongly believed. Stories abound about people, families and causes which benefited from her passionate support. Irma was not afraid to voice her opinion and in her own words, pushed many a person toward self-improvement. Her own life story served as a model for those whose lives she touched.

Irma was married to Gordon Johnson at the old Presbyterian Church in Iron Mountain on June 1, 1957. Gordon was a dairy farmer living near Felch. After her retirement in 1977, she and Gordon traveled all over the world, visiting many nations on nearly every continent. Irma and Gordon had a special companion relationship and spent much of their lives sharing in gardening, camping, visiting family and working together on projects.

Irma was a member of Zion Lutheran Church in Metropolitan, and served the Wisconsin-Upper Michigan Synod of the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and its successor Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) on numerous committees. She was on the Board of Directors of both the Women of LCA and Women of ELCA and was on the Transition Team when the LCA joined with other Lutheran bodies to become the ELCA.

She was a past member of the Iron Mountain-Kingsford Women's Club, the American Association of University Women, the Metropolitan Farmers Union, a life member of Epsilon Sigma Phi (dedicated to fostering standards of excellence in the Extension System) as well as a life member of the National Association of Home Economists.

Among the passions in her life was support of young women as they struggled

to get an education and improve their lives. She generously supported many such young women both here and abroad, among them a journalism student named Irene at Tumaini University in Tanzania. Irene, with Irma's support and encouragement, has recently become a faculty member at that university after receiving her master's degree in the Netherlands.

Always the educator willing to devote her time and her resources, Irma incorporated teaching into all aspects of her life, even in her travels. On one occasion, she conducted quilting classes to women in Tanzania where she and Gordon were visiting ELCA missionaries they supported.

She is survived by her husband, Gordon and several nieces and nephews including her special niece, Elaine St. Pierre of Winchenden, Mass.

Irma was preceded in death by her parents; her brother, Carl Saven; and her sister, Laila Amann.

Visitation will be held from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Friday at the Erickson-Rochon & Nash Funeral Home.

Funeral services will be held at 4 p.m. on Friday at the funeral home with Pastor Kevin Sullivan officiating.

Burial will be in the Felch Cemetery.

Condolences to the family of Irma Johnson may be expressed online at www.ernashfuneralhomes.com

The family has entrusted the Erickson-Rochon & Nash Funeral Home with the arrangements.

Previous Events

Visitation

AUG 27. 2:00 PM - 4:00 PM (CT)

Erickson-Rochon and Nash Funeral Home
901 Carpenter Ave.
Iron Mountain, MI 49801

Funeral Service

AUG 27. 4:00 PM (CT)

Erickson-Rochon and Nash Funeral Home
901 Carpenter Ave.
Iron Mountain, MI 49801

Tribute Wall

BC

“ Dear Gordon and family.
I received an email from MSU Extension that Irma died. I would like to express my thoughts and prayers for your loss. I wish words would bring comfort.
I knew of Irma when I joined MSU Extension in 1967 in Lenawee County. As my love of Keweenaw was strong I wanted to be close. I was able to be with Extension Home Economist in the U. P. in 1976 located in Houghton.. working for Keweenaw, Houghton and Baraga and later Ontonagon Co.
Irma was a dedicated EHE. we all enjoyed. Her smile like in the picture is what I recall...her humor. Her opinions of how EHE's can find out the needs and best reach people in the county were so evident.
I extend my condolences.
Barb Yeakel (single when she knew me) Koski

Barbara Koski - MSU Extension co-worker - September 02, 2010 at 12:00 AM

JS

“ I extend my condolences to Mrs. Johnson's family. Although I never met her, I feel a sense of gratitude in her career accomplishments with Michigan State's Cooperative Extension Service. Our organization name is now changed to MSU Extension, but our business is still to help people improve their lives through the educational process. Our Upper Peninsula Extension team has shared a special feeling of camaraderie in my 21 years of service, and I think that was even stronger in earlier times.

Mrs. Johnson's work in extension certainly contributed to that goal. I am sorry about her passing, but proud to read about a fellow extension workers lifetime of accomplishment.

Jim Isleib - Munising, MI - U.P. MSU Extension staff - September 02, 2010 at 12:00 AM

JC

“ I wish to share my condolence to all of the Johnson family. I too have the good fortune of having met Irma Johnson through now departed Frank Molinare, UP Regional Extension Supervisor. I had been invited to the UP in 1975 as part of my staff development for Extension to meet Extension staff members who one could model after. Frank, had me met Irma as he spoke highly of the skills and abilities as well as her focus on youth and their Education. She was outspoken and straight forward when I met her. It was impressive to meet someone who knew so much about people and also wanted to so much to improve the overall well being. Juan

Juan Marinez - Okemos, MI - Colleague - September 02, 2010 at 12:00 AM

LN

“ Irma's obituary was shared through our office email. I wish I would have known Irma to gain some of her philosophy on life. It sounds like she lived life to her fullest. I just wanted to express my condolences to you.

Linda Stemen - none - September 01, 2010 at 12:00 AM

JC

“ To the family of Irma Johnson please accept my sympathy!

I was a MSU County Extension Director in Baraga County from 1973 through Irma's retirement in 1977. During that time I came to know and appreciate Irma's insight, her sense of humor, her directness, and most importantly her dedication to educating people and new Extension staff through MSU Extension programs and her personal contacts. Irma was an excellent and highly thought of MSU Extension professional!

James Krenek

James Krenek - Baraga, MI - Former MSU Extension co-worker - September 01, 2010 at 12:00 AM