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LIFE

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Life

'Garlic man' Ted Maczka, 83, was committed to the clove

Prince Edward County grower died this week after a stroke.

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BERNARD WEIL / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Ted Maczka was known as the "Fish Lake Garlic Man." He bought a hobby farm near Fish Lake in the early 1970s and began cultivating and researching garlic.

By: **Stephanie MacLellan** Staff Reporter, Published on Thu Jan 02 2014

Garlic lost its biggest fan this week.

Ted Maczka, who spent four decades growing and researching garlic on a farm in Prince Edward County and driving across the province to proclaim its health benefits, died Monday after a stroke. He was 83.

Maczka became known as the "Fish Lake Garlic Man" and evangelized for the lowly bulb with missionary zeal. He wore a baseball cap with garlic bulbs affixed to the brim, and drove a car with a giant, homemade bulb on top.

"This was something that got under his skin and, man, he ran with it and never looked back," said his daughter, Barbara Campbell.

Maczka was born in Tarnow, Poland, about an hour's drive east of Krakow. He spent two years in a labour camp during World War II, suffering severe injuries to his right hip that plagued him the rest of his life.

He came to Canada in 1952 and trained as a tool and die machinist. Then he launched a retail and wholesale business, importing food products from Europe and selling them at a deli on Huron St. He would deliver goods to other small European businesses around southern Ontario while his wife, Wilma, worked at the shop.

Maczka had gardened his whole life, and "always had his hands in the soil," Campbell said, but it wasn't until he read a news article about Canada importing millions of dollars worth of garlic from China that it became his life's passion.

He bought a hobby farm in Demorestville, near Fish Lake in the early 1970s and began cultivating and researching garlic, experimenting with different varieties and growing conditions. He had no formal education in agriculture or botany but did extensive research on his own, Campbell said. He became so convinced of garlic's health benefits, and of how easy it was to grow in Canada, that he started touting it at the Royal Winter Fair and other Canadian farm fests.

"He pioneered this," Campbell said. "Nobody else was doing anything in garlic back in the '70s."

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Maczka attended the Canadian Garlic Festival in Sudbury almost every year since its inception in 1992, event founder Mary Stefura said. He often shared growing advice with festival guests. "He was really the Johnny Appleseed in Canada with garlic," she said.

"He really believed in his product, thought Canadian garlic was the best garlic in the world, that it was easy to grow here and that we shouldn't be getting it anywhere else."

It wasn't always a smooth road for Maczka. He and Wilma separated, but they remained on good terms. And naturally, the man with garlic on his hat wasn't always taken seriously. "For the majority of my youth, I thought (Maczka) was absolutely insane," his granddaughter, Alley Adams, wrote in a tribute to him.

But the strange looks and snickers never fazed him, Campbell said.

"He loved to be in the spotlight," she said. "He didn't take offence to anybody . . . He was strong that way."

His convictions about garlic's healthy properties and the benefits of local, organic farming are now mainstream, she points out.

For her part, Adams was inspired by his enthusiasm and the way he followed his dream.

"My grandfather believed in it so much, it was contagious," she said. "You wanted to listen to him, read his articles even taste his garlic fudge (I don't recommend). It wasn't logical but his passion for his craft was mesmerizing and what made him so unique."

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