

Janosov dedicated self to saving history

"DO NOT strive to be a person of success, but rather a person of value," Albert Schweitzer, the great humanitarian advised his students. "The successful person takes more from life than he gives. But the person of value gives more to life than he can ever take from it."

Schweitzer might have pointed to Robert A. Janosov as an example of a "valuable person." Janosov, who recently died at age 62, was a native of the Wyoming Valley who served as Northeast Pennsylvania's strongest advocate on the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Although he might easily have pursued a more lucrative career in politics or journalism, he chose to be a public historian. Perhaps his modest origins as the son of a Hazleton newspaper worker swayed his decision, but Janosov never saw himself as an elite. As a result, he chose to teach at Luzerne County Community College instead of a state university or private institution.

While he could do more than hold his own with academic historians and understood the necessity of scholarly research, Janosov always felt that the academics tended to lose the human element of history, which is so important to the general public. As a result, Janosov's research concentrated on material culture - buildings, photographs, and artifacts - that

COMMENTARY

WILLIAM
KASHATUS

surrounded him in the anthracite culture.

Using early 20th century glass plate negatives, he painstakingly cobbled together the history of Concrete City, a model residential community for coal mining families built by the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad at the turn of the century. Afterward, he sponsored the creation of a state historical marker that now stands in the Hanover section of Nanticoke.

Visiting dozens of historic properties in the region, Janosov took extensive photographs and notes on architecture, wrote and published surveys for the state and local preservation societies as well as for the National Park Service. His work in this area will be published by the prestigious Oxford University Press next year. At the time of his death, he was heavily involved in research on the Huber Breaker project in hopes of writing a book that would serve to expand anthracite tourism into the Wyoming Valley.

Noting his reputation as a tireless advocate for the preservation of Northeastern Pennsylvania's rich history, Gov.

Edward Rendell requested that Janosov serve as a commissioner of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in 2002.

For all his contributions to public history though, Janosov was at his best in a classroom. He had a remarkable ability to make history come alive for students by appealing to their intellect, emotions, and sense of social justice. He was proud of the fact that he hailed from the same modest circumstances as most of his pupils. That is why he maintained high standards, worked hard to help his students achieve them, and actively mentored many for positions in the disciplines of history and teaching.

I will miss Bob Janosov tremendously, not only as a friend, but a mentor. The former are rare, the latter, rarer still. Through his passionate commitment to Northeast Pennsylvania's past, he showed so many of us - students and teachers, history buffs and historians, residents and visitors, colleagues and policymakers - how to link the past and the present together in an active, on-going dialogue. In the process, he taught us something about our community, ourselves, and our responsibility to preserve the region's rich history.

William C. Kashatus is a professor of history at Luzerne County Community College.

TIMES
LEADER