



## Donald Edward Ludka

February 25, 1941 - December 26, 2019

Don, also known as “Papa Don,” to his 22—and counting— grandchildren and great grandchildren, was born to Marie and Robert Ludka on February 25, 1941. He passed peacefully on December 26, 2019 at the Munson Health Care Hospice House surrounded by his loving family. Complications related to pancreatic cancer took his life, but not before he could enjoy his favorite Christmas meal of prime rib.

Don’s business acumen was well known, as was his prodigious work ethic. For most of his working life he held two full-time jobs concurrently while raising five children with his high school sweetheart and beloved wife of 57 years, Jean Ann Carroll Ludka. Over the course of 47 years, Don’s professional pursuits included work in meat packing, meat processing, sales, and retail. He and Jean owned and operated “The Lollipop Shop”, and later, two 7-11 stores in Traverse City. Throughout his career, he modeled for his children and grandchildren the value of a hard day’s work. At one point or another, all his children and many of his grandchildren honed their math skills working a cash register. They also learned to assist customers, keep a clean store and catch the occasional crook—Don was always the example in dealing with everything the stores could throw his way and had many funny stories related to people who thought they could take advantage of one of the younger “employees”. Over the last few years, it became common for regular customers to ask Don when he’d retire. His reply was always that he’d retire “When you see Reynolds-Jonkhoff drive up to the front door of the store.” He had a keen wit and could see the humor in almost every situation.

Don loved to eat, but more than that, he loved to cook and share a meal with those he loved. He was the consummate “Iron Chef” and had his very own personalized chef’s uniform which he wore proudly in his kitchen. He and Jean opened their home to all family members every holiday, conjuring a meal that left no one hungry, and rewarding each of us with “to go” boxes at the meal’s end. In his kitchen he was a gourmet, but on the road, one could not travel with Don without stopping at some of his favorites...Freeway Fritz, Clyde’s Drive In, Alice’s Kandy and Korn to name just a few.

Don spent every Sunday surrounded by family, sitting on the couches watching the Lions or U of M with grandkids running wild and having fun with their many cousins. He loved the commotion of a large family, always exuding a calm, comforting warmth as he sat back, teasing and cajoling—observing the loving, joyful relationships he and Jean had nurtured among their children and their children’s children. By his example, they all learned to be selfless, kind and loving parents. His wife and kids always came first and there was no sacrifice he was unwilling to make to ensure their happiness. He was so devoted that he thought nothing of driving Jean and the girls to Somerset Mall, commandeering a scooter and spending all day running packages from stores to his car while they shopped. He would drive Jean to Birch Run, sitting in the car to wait—unless the store sold sofas, in which case he’d occasionally nap in a particularly cozy display window.

Don’s sense of humor and quick wit was legendary and earned him a number of loyal friends and employees over the years. He maintained those strong relationships by treating his customers and partners with respect and by earning the respect of those he did business with. He was profoundly generous, often to a fault. He was always thinking of ways to help those in need and he followed through on every idea he had.

Don was an ardent Catholic, and often talked of Jesus Christ. He looked forward to meeting Him in the hereafter, a place where the Lions never humiliate themselves and their many devoted fans in public. He instilled a sense of competitiveness in all of his children, as he was a sportsman in every sense of the word. He supported every endeavor of his children, especially those revolving around St. Francis sports. He was a fierce advocate of his children but could also let them know if they had overstepped. He will be sorely missed at St. Francis football games that won’t be the same without him in the stands or pacing behind the bleachers when the outcome was uncertain.

We learned so much from this wonderfully humble man and he will be missed by his entire family and many acquaintances. He is survived by his wife Jean, children, grandchildren and great grandchildren: Mark & Suzette / Maria (Timmy and Vivian Ryan), Jonathan, Anna, Nicholas; Chris & Cyndi / McKaely (Matthew and Henley Johnson), Anthony, Max, Remo & Sam; Ben & Andrea / Olivia, Helen, and Rosie; Courtney & Aaron Biggar / Matthew, Luke, Eli, Zachariah; Josh & Brandee / Brenen, Maren, Harper, Hannah; Sisters Linda (Jerry) Dell, Barbara (Mark) Ciolek and many extended family, friends and

colleagues.

The family wishes to thank the Munson Healthcare Hospice staff for their loving and compassionate care in Don's final days.

Memorial contributions in memory of Don may be directed to Traverse City St. Francis Athletic Department.

Funeral arrangements have been made with Reynolds-Jonkhoff. Visitation will take place on Monday, December 30, 2019 from 5-7 PM, with the recitation of the rosary at 7 PM. The funeral mass will take place on Tuesday, December 31, 2019 at 11 AM at St. Francis Catholic Church, with visitation preceding the mass starting at 10 AM. Burial will take place immediately following the mass at Memorial Gardens of Traverse City.

# Cemetery

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# Events

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**Grand Traverse Memorial Gardens**  
3575 Veterans Drive  
Traverse City, MI, 49684

**DEC 30 Visitation** 05:00PM - 07:00PM  

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Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home  
305 Sixth St, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

**DEC 30 Rosary** 07:00PM  

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Reynolds-Jonkhoff Funeral Home  
305 Sixth St, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

**DEC 31 Visitation** 10:00AM - 11:00AM  

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St. Francis Catholic Church  
1025 S. Union, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

**DEC 31 Mass of Christian Burial** 11:00AM  

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St. Francis Catholic Church  
1025 S. Union, Traverse City, MI, US, 49684

# Comments

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“ I worked for Don and Jean at 7-11 and am saddened by his passing. I am praying for the family. I admired both Don and Jean and their wonderful family and the way you knew it was a loving family by the way they interacted. I'm thankful for getting to know Don. So sorry. Joanne Springberg.

**Joanne Love Springberg** - April 17, 2020 at 11:48 PM

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“ Don was a great man. I remember fishing at the cottage and instilling his knowledge of walleye fishing to all of us. He loved my mom's pies and i bet she had one waiting for him in Heaven. God Bless the Ludka family in your time of grief. Bill Connolly

**Bill Connolly** - December 31, 2019 at 10:55 AM

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“ a great man who will be sorely missed, I worked for Don in the early-mid 70's when he owned the meat packing plant on Cedar Run Road (my first job while in attending TC Central High School). My thoughts and prayers are with his family and friends.

**Stephen Fortin** - December 30, 2019 at 11:01 AM

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“ Great memories with all of our families living above Junior High. Love the Ludka family. Papa Don was a great person! Love, Jeff Connolly

**jeff Connolly** - December 29, 2019 at 01:47 PM

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“ To Jean and the Ludka Family

So sorry to hear Don passed away. I will always remember our walks down the 4th floor hallways at Munson trying not to show off our bums. We had some great laughs.

Don will be missed by many but remembered by all.

Mary and I are in Tampa for the Holiday's and will not be able to attend the services, however, we will be praying for you and your family.

God Bless you all.

Pat and Mary Brady Family

**Patrick Brady** - December 29, 2019 at 08:21 AM

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“ Dear Ludka family,

We were so sorry to hear that Don passed away. I have so many great memories of working for you at the Lollipop shop, staying with the kids when you were on buying trips, and spending time with your family. Steve has many good memories and stories of dealing with Don through the restaurant. We are now living in Minnesota or we would both be there to see you each in person. We pray that God will wrap you in His loving arms and give you His peace! Steve and Sandy Arnot

**Sandra Arnot** - December 28, 2019 at 03:51 PM

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“ My heart breaks for yet another loss... Jean and family I am so sorry to hear of Don's passing. One more St Francis alum; think of the stories he and Jim will be sharing in heaven! My prayers are with you as you walk this similar journey. Love to you all.  
Carolyn Youker

**carolyn Youker** - December 28, 2019 at 11:54 AM

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“ I'm so sorry to hear of Don's passing. Every day at 7-11 before I retired I got my coffee and listened to him expound on life. Jean, hugs for you! My sympathies for the family. John Jensen

**John Jensen** - December 28, 2019 at 10:11 AM

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“ Dear Jean and Family, I'm so sorry for your loss. I have so many sweet memories of Don each time I went in the store for my morning coffee during the time I lived in TC. May God be with you and fill your hearts with sweet memories of Don also. God Bless All of you. RoseAnne Cook

RoseAnne Cook - December 28, 2019 at 08:27 AM

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“ Dear Jean and Barb (Ludka),  
A great man with a great legacy has passed from this earth. Don knew the value of a hard days work and he passed that on to all in his family. He will be missed but not soon forgotten. May you be comforted by knowing he is now at peace and enjoying his just reward.

Paul Greenlaw

Paul Greenlaw - December 28, 2019 at 08:02 AM

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“ My deepest sympathy to the entire family. I knew Don from St. Francis High school, and then as food rep delivering steaks for LaSenorita. You were kind, helpful, and so proud of your family. I know they will miss you so very much. Hugs and prayers for all of you.

Lura Ruede - December 27, 2019 at 10:01 PM

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“ My heartfelt condolences to the entire family. Such a remarkable man. I pray that the joys you carry in your heart help you through this time. God Bless

Jodi Fartand - December 27, 2019 at 06:13 PM

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“ So sorry Jean and family for the loss of a great man. My thoughts and prayers are with you. Mary Burns Marois

Mary Marois - December 27, 2019 at 04:00 PM

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“ From our high school on, Don and Jean were always top notch! Don will be so missed and I want to extend my sincere condolences to Jean and all the family. You will be in my thoughts and prayers as you go through this trying time.  
Betty Plough

**betty plough** - December 27, 2019 at 02:41 PM



“ Our sincere sympathy to all of the Ludka Family. Don was a very special, kind man and will be missed by many. May you rest in Heavenly Peace Mr. Ludka.

Carolyn and Steve Balog

**carolyn BALOG** - December 27, 2019 at 02:49 PM



“ Thinking of everyone at this most difficult time for the Ludka family. May you share Peace & Joy in the wonderful memories you have of him. My thoughts & prayers are with you all.  
Pauline Murphy

**Pauline Murphy** - December 29, 2019 at 08:18 PM