

Irena Ungar

(1916-2002)

Judge, philanthropist, community leader



POLISH SPIRIT



Irena Ungar had a remarkable career spanning volunteer intelligence service for the Allies during the war, diplomatic work at the Canadian Embassy in Vienna (1965-66) and the position of a judge of Canadian Citizenship Court in 1973.

Born in Poland, Irena Ungar left her homeland after the outbreak of war in 1939 and her journey brought her through Romania, Yugoslavia, Italy, France and Portugal to Canada in 1941. A great patriot, always eager to help people in need, already in 1945-46 she was in charge of the United Polish Relief Fund working with the Canadian Red Cross. Fluent in several languages, she worked as interpreter for the Labour and Immigration Departments. Ever active in the community, she served on many Boards of Directors – the Copernicus Lodge for seniors, Canadian Polish Congress (Toronto district), Polish Canadian Women's Federation (vice-president, Branch 1), Community Folk Arts Council of Toronto, the Toronto General Hospital, the Catholic Children Aid Society, the Royal Canadian Air Force Association (Branch 430). She was chair person of the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto for New Canadians, and the Advisory Board of the Community Folk Arts Council.

To promote Polish culture, she co-founded the half-million-dollar Slaby-Ungar Endowment Fund for Polish Language and Literature studies at the University of Toronto. In her will, she left her entire estate to the charities she supported during her lifetime. She helped many immigrants by working together with the Canadian Polish Congress (Toronto Branch) on a sponsorship programme for new arrivals from Poland. Highly respected in the community, she was invited to many important community functions as a guest of honour.

She received an honorary membership in the Association of Polish Engineers in Canada, and Gold Insignia of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association.

For her community service and life accomplishments, Irena Ungar was awarded the Gold Medal by the Canadian Polish Congress, the Gold Cross of Merit by the Polish Government in Exile, the Sursum Corda medal by the Polish Government, and was in 1972 named Officer of the Order of Canada by the Government of Canada.

Photos from top left clockwise:

• Irena Ungar • Consecrating ceremony at Polish Home, Rome, 1981 / Photo – Pontificia Fotografia by Felici • Visit of the renowned Polish pianist Witold Malczuzynski at the House of Commons, Ottawa, 1963 / Photo – Studio C. Marcil • Meeting with Arthur Eggleton, mayor of Toronto
Other photos – private archive