

Stories of Service

John and Maria Chomeau

Written by Anne (Chomeau) Kifer and Nikolai Rudenko, November 2024

John and Maria Chomeau were members of the PAX community from the late 1960's until their move to Colonial Beach, Virginia in 2004. They were not one of the original founders of PAX but they joined shortly after PAX got started in McLean, Virginia.

Their daughter Anne remembers attending a PAX celebration at Pimmit Hills Elementary School as a very young child in the late 1960's and understanding this was a different kind of Mass. There were many years that the Chomeau family attended the 9am Mass at Saint Lukes Catholic Church in McLean. They always sat in the second row of the right side of the church. The Chomeau children were involved with Scouts through St. Luke's Church, Youth Basketball and singing with the PAX folk group.

While John and Maria were not very active in Mass Planning or attending the many protest marches that PAX members attended, they were active in their own way. Maria often cooked the unleavened Eucharist bread for Mass and would bring flowers for the altar. John served on the Steering Committee and was very involved in the search for a new home when PAX had to move from Williamsburg Middle School in Arlington, VA and Franklin Sherman School in McLean Virginia. He was a major liaison between PAX and their current hosts, St. Luke's Serbian Orthodox Church in McLean.

While their four children were young and they were both working full time, John and Maria did not have a lot of time for community service. All members of the Chomeau family were involved with soccer. John was a referee for many years and all other members played on McLean teams, including Maria.

John and Maria did find time to get food ready for when PAX was committed to the Zacchaeus Soup Kitchen. They often went on the Saturday morning trips to serve at the kitchen.

They were also very involved with the "Christmas in April" programs that PAX participated in as a community. When Margaret Schwartz adopted her two sons from Ukraine, John was the lead in having PAX perform its own "Christmas in April" to Margaret's house to get it ready for the newly formed family. After the boys arrived, he also spent a lot of time at their house because he was fluent in Russian and could speak with the boys in a language familiar to them.

Maria and John were both EMTs (Emergency Medical Technicians). They decided to become certified as EMTs after responding to several very serious accidents near their house on Georgetown Pike. They wanted to learn how they could be more helpful in such a traumatic situation. Maria also had a long career as a Medical Technologist.

Since John and Maria both had medical training, they would donate their time to Christ House in Washington DC. Christ House is a homeless shelter for men who were dying of AIDS. John and Maria were part of this ministry in the 1980s when AIDS had a huge stigma attached to it. The commitment was to volunteer during one day, stay overnight and then stay for part of the next day. They would provide medical support to the residents of this shelter.

Even after moving to Colonial Beach, Virginia, in 2004, John and Maria continued this type of service. They volunteered every Saturday at the local "free clinic." Again they used their medical knowledge to help the patients. But they found they had a language barrier because many of the patients spoke Spanish. So, at 70 years old, John and Maria began to take Spanish lessons so they could be more helpful to this population of patients.

While in Colonial Beach, John also volunteered with the local rescue squad. He would get the call, sometimes at 2 in the morning, get out of bed, drive to where the ambulance was kept, drive to the emergency scene, drive to the hospital 45 minutes away and then reverse the whole process. He was always finding ways to help others.

While his four children were still at home, John used to volunteer at the Ski Liberty ski resort in Pennsylvania as a member of the National Ski Patrol. He would often go for the weekend, staying overnight in Fairfield, Pennsylvania. His children definitely benefited from this commitment in that they received free season passes and were able to ski anytime their schedules allowed.

Probably the biggest contribution to PAX made by John and Maria Chomeau was helping Nikolai Rudenko and his wife Lora emigrate to the United States with their children and Lora's parents. This wonderful family has given much to PAX over the years and are valued members of the community. The relationship between John and Maria and Nikolai and Lora was more than just a friendship or sponsorship. It was rooted in mutual understanding and respect, trust and affection, with a strikingly similar and at the same time completely different life experience.