

GERRY ZEKOWSKI, 66, LIGHTING INNOVATOR

By **Michael Ko, Tribune Staff Writer**

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Whether it was shopping malls or office complexes, zoos or nuclear power plants, Gerry Zekowski knew how to shed a little light--literally.

Mr. Zekowski, 66, a nationally recognized lighting consultant who designed exterior and interior lighting schemes for hundreds of buildings and structures across the country, died Oct. 6 of stomach cancer at his home in Skokie.

Born and raised in Far Rockaway in Long Island, N.Y., Mr. Zekowski served as an intelligence officer for the U.S. Army during the Korean War before moving to Texas to work as a sales representative for the lighting company Lightolier.

He soon expanded his role with the company and revolutionized the lighting industry by creating lighting labs--full-size, museum-quality rooms to demonstrate how lighting alternatives could work in specific situations.

Mr. Zekowski moved to Chicago in 1986 to work as an independent lighting designer and continued to design lighting schemes for all sorts of structures. He also served as the Chicago section president of the Illuminating Engineering Society of North America.

"I'm not sure that everyone in the industry knew that he paved the many roads that a lot of us travel today. I know for sure of his utter genius," said Andy Owens of Owens Lighting in Louisville.

In Chicago, Mr. Zekowski set up the lighting structures for the Greyhound Bus Depot, North Western train station and the downtown post office. He also manufactured the glows from two buildings in Chicago's nighttime skyline, Two Prudential Plaza and First National Bank.

They're "perhaps the most powerful remembrance" of him, said his wife, Ruth.

She also said her husband was a dedicated teacher who frequently traveled to Canada and Brazil to lecture at lighting conventions.

"He gave a series of speeches to Canadian utility companies, and it was mostly technical stuff I didn't understand," she said.

"But I remember being so entertained. I was never bored because he was such a dramatic presenter."

Mr. Zekowski also is survived by a son, Greg; daughters Jill, Jodi and Jeane; two stepchildren, Peter Piepgras and Christine Shiel; and three step-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at 2 p.m. Oct. 25 at the DoubleTree Hotel, 9599 Skokie Blvd.