

# Pioneering businesswoman Senske dies

## Was key part of Spokane lawn-spray company

**BY TOM SOWA**

Staff writer

Back in the late 1940s when Spokane businesses had phone numbers starting with "Keystone 5," Elizabeth Senske was the brains behind one of the country's first lawn-spray companies.

Senske, who died this week at the age of 87, was the husband and partner of Bill Senske, whom she had married in 1941.

In 1947, fresh after moving to Spokane, the couple started the business that later became Senske Lawn and Tree Care.

Sixty years later, the Senske family has never found any record of another U.S. lawn-spraying company starting before theirs, said Bill Senske, who called his

wife "a great partner and a wonderful mother of five children."

She was the first woman in Washington state to take and pass the state pest control licensing test, said Bill Senske.

"That was when things were getting sticky in Korea and I was worried that I'd be back in the Army, so we made sure she was able to run the business if I left," said Bill, who had served in the chemical corps in World War II.

"We all went over to Puyallup, in the 1950s, and took the test. Elizabeth had the best scores in the group," he recalled. Though she had the license, Elizabeth Senske never had to apply fertilizer or pesticides because Bill never had to serve in Korea.

In addition to being company book-



Senske

keeper, she was the Senske company's chief problem-solver. Bill Senske said whenever customers had unusual bug invasions or tough lawn problems, Elizabeth would call specialists at Washington State University and explain

the problem.

"She got all the answers, and the entomologists liked to come up and visit us," he said. "She had great rapport with them," he said.

His wife's ability to make beautiful things led to them start a sideline company, when the lawn care firm was young and still struggling, he said.

Each holiday season for several years

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they worked for area companies or in private homes, creating unusual Christmas decorations.

Around 1950, Bill Senske said his wife created one of the Spokane Club's most unusual holiday trees. She borrowed 250 parakeets whose wings had been clipped, and added them to the branches of a majestic blue spruce in the club's lobby.

"She could take anything and make it truly beautiful," he said.

After the Senskes sold the lawn care firm to their son Chris, he moved the main office to the Tri-Cities. Elizabeth then had a chance to indulge her passion for miniatures, taking over from a family member Small Wonders, one of the area's favorite antique miniatures shops.

"She didn't make a lot of money but she had lots of fun," her husband said. "She didn't have customers. She had playmates." She sold the business in 1993.

A memorial service is set Sunday at Heritage Funeral Home.