

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 164, No. 13

Serving Chicago's legal community for 163 years



Andrzej Sciwiarski poses outside the Holocaust Museum in Skokie by a brick honoring his father that reads, "In loving memory, Zbigniew Sciwiarski risked his life to save others." The museum also erected a plaque in Zbigniew Sciwiarski's honor. Photo provided

'Risked his life to save others'

BY SARAH MANSUR
Law Bulletin staff writer

A routine state application to operate a video gaming terminal started Andrzej Sciwiarski along a journey into his late father's past — and his heroism — in Nazi-occupied Poland.

It started about seven years ago when Sciwiarski and his attorney Donna B. More began preparing his application for a gaming license.

In the course of filling out the application, Sciwiarski showed

Gaming license application helped uncover father's heroism in Nazi-occupied Poland

More a document from the state of Israel.

The document showed that his father earned the title of Righteous Among Nations, an honor bestowed to non-Jewish individuals by Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial, for risking their lives to aid Jews during the Holocaust.

Sciwiarski knew his father Zbigniew had received this honor in 1997 but he never learned all the details.

"I knew about it since 1997 when he was awarded the [Righteous Among Nations] medal," Sciwiarski said. "My father never made a big thing about it."

More, a partner at Fox Rothschild LLP, wanted to know what Sciwiarski's father did to receive this medal.

"And I said, 'Oh my gosh tell me about this.' So he then proceeded to tell me the story of what he knew about his dad," More said.

At the time, Sciwiarski knew his father had helped rescue a number of Polish Jews from a Nazi-occupied area in Poland.

"I said, 'This is an important story. It doesn't have much to do with your gaming application but

it deserves to be told,” she recalled.

“I was just like, ‘Andy, your dad’s a hero,’ and I don’t think Andy really appreciated it until we started doing this gaming application and then he started digging around.”

With More’s encouragement, Sciwiarski began researching the details surrounding the rescue that his dad participated in decades ago.

Sciwiarski, a Polish immigrant who has lived in the U.S. since 1984, uncovered books and articles online that shed light on this rescue story.

“I was getting deeper and deeper, trying to learn more,” he said.

Sciwiarski said he knew his father did an interview in 1997 with the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation where he discussed the rescue operation.

After his dad died in 2000, Sciwiarski tried to find a copy of the videotaped interview at his parent’s home in Poland but came up

empty-handed.

In his renewed quest to learn about his father’s past, Sciwiarski sought out again to find a copy of this interview and he ultimately received a DVD from the California university’s Shoah Foundation.

He watched the DVD and showed it to some of his friends, who also urged him to learn more.

“It wasn’t even me in the beginning who was interested so much,” Sciwiarski said. “It was lots of sources outside that made me start thinking, ‘This is something very important. This is something I should pursue and find more about.’”

He discovered that Zbigniew was 19 years old at the time of the rescue and was a volunteer at a hospital in Boerner—w, a neighborhood in Warsaw, Poland.

After the Germans suppressed the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, a woman came into the hospital to report that a group of seven people were trapped in the

basement of a home where a crew of Germans were living upstairs.

Six of the seven individuals in the basement were members of the Jewish Fighting Organization and had participated in the uprising. If found by the Germans, they would surely be killed.

Those trapped in the home included Jewish resistance leaders Marek Edelman, Yitzhak Cukierman and Zivia Lubetkin.

Zbigniew was part of a group that posed as Red Cross workers in order to enter the home and remove those trapped from the basement.

Zbigniew and his fellow rescuers brought them out on stretchers, covered with blankets. When stopped by German patrolmen, Zbigniew and the others explained that the people on the stretchers were stricken with typhoid and highly contagious.

All seven Jews were successfully rescued and taken to a local hospital to recover.

The younger Sciwiarski

learned that they all survived the war.

With this new information, Sciwiarski reached out to the Illinois Holocaust Museum in Skokie.

In September, the museum held a ceremony to dedicate plaques honoring Zbigniew and two others who were involved in efforts to rescue Jews during the Holocaust.

Outside the museum, there is a plaque with Zbigniew’s name and home country, and on the museum Tribute Pathway is brick with the inscription: “In loving memory, Zbigniew Sciwiarski risked his life to save others.”

Sciwiarski, who attended the ceremony in Skokie with his family, said the commendations outside the museum honoring his father carry significant meaning for him.

Those tributes will be around, even after he is gone.

“It’s like a permanent memory for my kids and grandkids,” he said.

smansur@lawbulletinmedia.com