

Caledon crier best in Ontario



Written By CITIZEN STAFF

Oyez! Oh yay! He did it again! On July 28, the Official Town Crier of Caledon was declared the 2018 Provincial Champion by the Ontario Guild of Town Criers.

This is the second time that Andrew Welch has been declared the overall winner of the prestigious annual Ontario Provincial Town Crier Competition, and also the second time that he has been awarded the Dave Thomson Memorial Trophy for Most Humorous Cry.

This year Welch won the title hands-down, taking first place in all three competition cries, as judged by such notables as Harold Redekopp, former executive vice-president of CBC TV, and CBC Radio's Eric Friesen.

Ontario is recognized internationally as boasting some of the finest town criers in the world, and a number of past world champions competed in this tournament, which was hosted on Amherst Island at the east end of Lake Ontario.

Welch, who was appointed Town Crier by Caledon town council seven years ago, continues to hold his own against veteran criers from all over the province ? many with decades of experience, and Caledon can now claim to hold a respectable place in global rankings.

In competition, criers are scored on their proclamation content, their presence, their vocal delivery, and their accuracy; and this year's repeat win was the result of a lot of hard work. Welch says he spent many hours crafting and reworking his proclamation wording, which he often creates with the additional challenge of being poetry with perfect rhymes and meter. There was also an historic Amherst Island cry that called for significant research ahead of time.

The tradition of modern town crying is often credited to Peter Cox, who was named Town Crier of Halifax in 1974. Among other civic duties, he became famous for welcoming thousands of cruise ship passengers to Halifax's port every year.

That public office rested empty after Cox died in 2009, until a new young Halifax crier, Will Brewer, was appointed earlier this year. Brewer made his own Canadian history as the first official crier with Down syndrome.

Having an Official Town Crier is perhaps still something of a novelty for Caledon, calling for very few civic appearances annually, not including the many events that Welch officiates at by request of local non-profits and others.

In some historic Ontario municipalities, such as Brantford and Kingston, the role is a central piece of their tourism and marketing plans, and has even grown to be a full-time job, similar to Cox's back in Halifax.

Although proclamations are not a full-time job for our crier, appearance fees allow him to travel to competitions around the province or across Canada, promoting his home town wherever he goes. ?When a crier opens a business or anniversary celebration, everyone's attention is captured,? says Welch, ?and the best criers can transform a boring ribbon-cutting ceremony into a memorable event with front-page coverage potential.?