

Comment ? Goodbye to a friend

By Bill Rea

As you probably know by now, Bill Whitbread died Sunday.

He was a long-time fixture with the Enterprise, which is the competition to the Citizen. But more important, he was a fixture in the community.

He was also a friend of mine.

It was 30 years ago Feb. 24 that I met Bill for the first time. I was a journalism student at Humber College, and that was the first day of my internship with what in those days was known as the Bolton Enterprise. He was one of a number of people I met that very busy day, but my first real memory of Bill came at the end. He and I were the last two in the office, and we were getting ready to leave when we heard fire trucks rush by (the Enterprise office was in the village core in those days).

?Should someone be following those trucks to see what that's all about?? asked the young whippersnapper who was myself.

Bill gave me his patented, world-weary grin and said, ?Go ahead.?

About eight years later, I related that story to Brian McFarlane of Hockey Night in Canada fame as part of a video tribute being made about Bill.

?I got my first front-page picture and Bill got the night off,? I told him.

In time, my internship came to an end, and I landed a job with ?that other paper.?

Bill became my competitor, but he was also a person I knew I could talk to. Few are the people I was more comfortable talking to than Bill Whitbread.

And it took little time for me to get a real appreciation of the regard with which he was held in the community.

I have spent my career working on community newspapers, and it's people like Bill who helped me really grasp the meaning of the word ?community.?

He was recognized in the fall of 1992, when a park in Bolton was renamed in his honour. I was at the banquet when it was announced. McFarlane was the keynote speaker and that video I referred to earlier was shown. The festivities concluded with remarks from Bill. I made a point of going up to him at the end of his address to shake hands with him.

?Well done,? I said to him.

?You too,? he replied.

Bill and I generally saw each other every Friday morning (during the school year) as we made the rounds of the local high schools, taking the Athlete of the Week pictures. Such was the case this past Friday, as he and I chatted about relatively minor stuff. We were both mindful that the schools were going to be closed the following Friday (Good Friday), so it had been agreed that we'd take the Athlete pictures today (Thursday).

?See you Thursday,? I called over my shoulder as Bill and I parted Friday. Those were the last words I spoke to Bill Whitbread. If I had only known.

So long, my friend.