

Obituary ? Caledon and Peel mourn ?an icon? in Richard Whitehead

By Bill Rea

His political career spanned decades, predating the formation of the Town of Caledon, and lasted until October's municipal elections. Former councillor Richard Whitehead died last Wednesday after a brief illness. He was 71.

Mr. Whitehead was the last deputy Reeve of the Village of Bolton, before it was amalgamated into the Town in 1974, and he served as the first Regional representative for Ward 5 (Bolton). He returned to office in the 1991 municipal elections, taking the Regional council seat for Wards 3 and 4 (Caledon East and the former Township of Albion). He made an unsuccessful run for mayor of Caledon in 2003, but returned to his former seat after the 2006 campaign.

?Caledon has lost an icon,? Mayor Allan Thompson declared, as he reflected on Mr. Whitehead's long political and community service.

?We lost the last of our founding fathers of confederation when it comes to the Region of Peel,? he observed. ?Love him or hate him for his politics, he was a great mentor. He gave me some real great advice.?

Thompson said he knew Mr. Whitehead a long time, adding his wife Ruthe was his Grade 5 teacher, and was always impressed with the depth of his knowledge.

?He really knew the Municipal Act,? he said.

?He sure knew Caledon well,? he added. ?He always believed he was doing the right thing for Caledon.?

Thompson also lamented the way Mr. Whitehead's political career ended, commenting the community never got a chance to thank him for his public service.

?It's a big loss for the community,? commented Councillor Nick deBoer, area representative of the same Wards Mr. Whitehead represented for the last eight years.

?It's a major loss,? he added. ?He always had Caledon top of mind. He's definitely going to be missed.?

?I don't think we disagreed on many issues,? deBoer observed. ?I enjoyed working with him.?

?I learned a lot from him over the course of eight years, and that's something I'm grateful for,? he added.

Mr. Whitehead was on the first Town of Caledon and Peel Regional councils, along with former Regional Chair Emil Kolb, and he recalled knowing Mr. Whitehead and his brother from their youth.

?I remember that their dad had taken over the General Motors dealership,? Kolb commented.

?He was always very involved, even as a young person, in many, many things,? Kolb observed, adding he always wanted to be a full-time politician, recalling how young he was when first elected to Bolton village council.

He was always very active in office, and Kolb recalled he was always willing to offer himself to work on any committee. He was chair of the Audit Committee at the region during his last couple of terms on council and always did a good job.

?Sometimes, he was a little long-winded, but he was always interested in the subject and had good questions,? he added.

Mr. Whitehead spent many years serving on the board of Toronto and Region Conservation Authority (TRCA).

?He was a very active and engaged member of our board,? commented Brian Denney, CEO of TRCA. ?Always had an interesting perspective on whatever issue it was.?

?He was very passionate about green space in Caledon and its role in the Greater Toronto Area,? he added, also observing Mr.

Whitehead was also passionate about forest management in Caledon. ?He had a very strong passion for all things environmental, I think.?

Caledon's Chief Administrative Officer Doug Barnes recalled how Mr. Whitehead enjoyed his dual role as a councillor and member of TRCA.

?he really worked hard to make that relationship solid,? he said.

?Richard always had a wealth of knowledge,? he added, commenting his corporate memory, concerning Caledon, went back to the early 1970s.

Mr. Whitehead had also been a senior provincial employee earlier in his career, and Barnes recalled that served him well as a councillor.

?He really understood the machinery of government, and things that you have to do to make things actually work,? he commented.

Mr. Whitehead was involved in many environmental issues, including the efforts to protect the Oak Ridges Moraine.

?I'm devastated,? commented Debbe Crandall, policy advisor for Save the Oak Ridges Moraine (STORM) Coalition.

She recalled having lunch with Mr. Whitehead frequently, with the discussion topic being mainly history.

?He was such a history buff,? she declared. ?He was just a walking book.?

He was also active in the Liberal party.

Richard Whitehead was a quiet but confident leader; the keeper of great knowledge and wisdom, read a joint statement issued by Lori Holloway and Rick Dewsbury of the Dufferin-Caledon federal and provincial riding associations. He was always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who asked.

He never let his politics interfere with what he knew was in the best interest of the people he served, the statement added. His experience, knowledge and wisdom is a huge loss for Caledon and for all of us who considered him a mentor and a friend.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Whitehead family and we thank them for generously sharing him with us during his many years of dedicated service.

Mr. Whitehead is survived by his wife Ruthe, daughter Kate and her husband Edgar, grandchildren Oskar, Leo and Orla, and his brother Don and his wife Carole.

A public celebration of his life will be held at Caledon Community Complex, 6215 Old Church Rd. next Thursday (April 16), from 2 to 4 p.m.

If desired, memorial donations may be made to the Headwaters Health Care Centre Emergency Department, 100 Rolling Hills Dr., Orangeville L9W 4X9

