

Teen Ranch founder Mel Stevens remembered by friends, family and the local community

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

Melville Charles Stevens, also known as Mel, was known as a kind, loyal, giving individual whose faith inspired all.

Stevens founded Teen Ranch, first in Australia in 1960, before returning home to Canada a decade later to begin the Christian camp in our beautiful area of Caledon. Mel and his wife Janet purchased 150 acres of land, boasting an old barn and farmhouse.

Mel and his family worked hard and held their trust in faith that they would battle through the hardships that came their way. The ice arena was later built, and an Olympic sized pad, called the Ice Corral, was constructed. Over time teams from the NHL and OHL would later train at the facility.

Mel's vision quickly blossomed into what we see at Teen Ranch today, where children have fun, train in their favourite sport and camp, just like their favourite hockey players. Families can enjoy a much-needed weekend getaway and even schools can visit their education facility. They host horse programs including trail rides, riding lessons and hunter and jumper shows for all horse lovers.

Mel Stevens passed on Aug. 8.

“Mel's God-given vision has been instrumental in pointing thousands of people to faith in Christ by coming to know Jesus on a personal level. Mel's unwavering faith and willingness to follow God's calling through fear, uncertainty, trials, and tribulations have left a legacy of a true and faithful servant,” stated his obituary.

He spread his unwavering faith among those around him, including family, friends and the community.

For the past 13 years, he was the chaplain for the Toronto Argonauts. Alongside the Argos, he spent years working with players from both the Toronto Maple Leafs and Toronto Blue Jays.

“The Argos are saddened to learn of the passing of former team chaplain Mel Stevens,” stated on the team's twitter. “The Argos extend their deepest condolences to the Stevens family.”

We at the Citizen, decided to share some words from those who had the privilege to call Mel a boss, mentor, father and friend.

His passion for sports and his faith, many players were changed, inspired and motivated by Mr. Stevens, in more ways than one, says Paul Henderson, former professional hockey player and dear friend to Mel.

“The man that I loved and respected so much. You see, Mel led me to the Lord. Became a teacher, mentor and prayer warrior and actually modelled for me what it looked like to live each and every day in a manner worthy and pleasing to the Lord. And Teen Ranch became an oasis for the Henderson family and many other athletes back in the early 70's,” Henderson said. “Mel had a heart of gold. He had the patience of Job with me and actually pushed me out of my comfort zones. Last week Ronny Ellis and I spoke to about 50 NHL, ex-NHL Hockey players and Mel Stevens was the center of about a 45-minute talk. So, Mel has influenced so many, so many people.”

One of the six of Mel's children, Corrie Stevens Ensom, shared words of her father and how he inspired and taught her to be who she is today.

“When he made the decision as a young man to go anywhere and do anything God asked of him, I'm sure he had no idea how great and wide-spread his influence would be. He was humble and wise and had a gift of loving people,” she stated. “He has taught me to

love, forgive, assume the best in people, to serve others, to work hard and aim higher, to do things with excellence, to be five minutes early rather than one minute late, to be available, teachable and usable, to dream big, to trust in God in everything and always give Him the glory.?

Staff members have been greatly impacted by the loss of their dear friend but are thankful for the time they spent with Mel. That includes Brian Smith, who has been a part of the Teen Ranch family for roughly 20 years.

?I started working, serving Jesus at the Ranch in 2000 and for the most part have been there ever since. When people have asked me about Mel, I have always said that there isn't one person there who I have seen as a bigger role model than Mel. I've always said, if there was drywall to be done, Mel was there. If there was painting to be done, Mel was there. If there was construction of any kind to be done, Mel was there,? said Smith.

He added, ?I can't tell you how much he will be missed now that he's gone, by me and all the other people who have had the pleasure of meeting him. I truly believe that the first words he will hear now that he is gone are, ?well done, my good and faithful servant' and nobody deserves to hear those words more than him.?

Mel's son Tim Stevens, who is also the Director at Teen Ranch, stated how honoured he was to have a father like Mel.

?I was privileged to know Mel Stevens as a boss, mentor, friend, and father. As a boss, he set a high standard of expectation for himself and those of us who work at Teen Ranch,? Tim said. ?He instilled in us the ideas of giving more than we took, doing things with excellence and believing it a privilege to serve others and our community. His ?tagline' for the Ranch was ?Aiming Higher'. As a mentor, friend and father, he expected and encouraged us to be the best we could be. He would gently tell us if we were wrong or needed to make a change. He was never afraid to tell us he loved us.?

He added, ?Being able to share with people that we could have a personal relationship with God through Jesus was his life's goal.?

Ann Stevens, Mel's daughter-in-law expressed her love for her father-in-law and who he was to her and her family.

?How is a thirteen-year-old girl transformed from horse-crazy to loving God more than horses in a camp week? Mel Stevens was instrumental. He loved God and he loved people. Mel naturally shared his faith in the God of the Bible. Mel lived out his faith daily, consistently, through the many years. As a result? Mel Stevens is a ?legend in his own time',? she explained. ?Mel often spoke of how God gave him a life of adventure beyond his wildest dreams. But Mel humbly gave all the credit and glory to God for what he had accomplished in and through Mel's life. I'm reminded of the words to a poem by C.T. Studd, ?Only one life, 'twill soon be past, Only what's done for Christ will last.'

Mel was truly admired by those in his community from far and wide. Many had words to share about Mr. Stevens, including Solicitor General and Dufferin-Caledon MPP Sylvia Jones.

?Mel's faith was central to how he approached life and serving community. His vision to expand a Christian summer camp into a year-round facility with the addition of the Ice Corral was literally a leap of faith,? said MPP Jones. ?I remember Mel sharing many stories over the years about his challenges building the Ice Corral and how often a former camper would step in to offer a service or materials. It spoke to the impact he and Teen Ranch has had on so many young people in Dufferin-Caledon, and now across the Globe.?

Mayor Allan Thompson also had a couple words to share with us at the Citizen about Mel.

?Mel Stevens dedicated his life to supporting and encouraging young people as they navigated the challenges of growing up? said Caledon Mayor Allan Thompson ?He was a man of unwavering faith whose life and legacy will long be revered and remembered.?