

Thompson, George

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**G**eorge Thompson has only sported facial hair once in his life. He hated it. But he did it to help Belleville celebrate its centennial year in 1978.

As chairman of Belleville's centennial committee, Thompson said he felt he had little choice but to participate in a beard growing competition that year.

"Lots of people did silly things that year that they might not otherwise have done," said the 76-year-old Thompson. "I grew a beard because I was asked. I found it a rather unpleasant experience."

He grew it for four months and was only too happy to shave it off when the contest ended.

Thompson was reminded of that experience while recently flipping through the family scrapbook devoted to the 1978 centennial celebration. He and his wife, Dorothy, recently donated that scrapbook to Mayor George Zegouras for a city hall keepsake.

The couple has had to move into an apartment and give away many of their possessions.

The reason for their move: George Thompson has Parkinson's disease, a deterioration of brain cells that control muscle movement, and it's getting worse.

He was first diagnosed with the disease in 1984, shortly after retiring from Bell Canada. The disease has progressed to the point where he has had to forego all his volunteer involvement in the community over the past several months.

Thompson can still get around with a walker or wheelchair as long as someone is beside him.

"I can see opportunities to help others but I no longer can help them because of my physical limitations," he said just days before moving from his Plaza Square home.

Thompson came to Belleville in 1969 and has left his mark on the community.

"What I started out in Belleville when I came is to try and make this community a better place to live in. I think I have succeeded. And the opportunity is out there for everyone to do the same."

Thompson's resolve to help others started early in life.

Right after graduating from high school in Brockville in 1944, he joined the Canadian Navy "just in time to be trained but not to serve overseas in the Second World War."

"I came from a sailing family and I was disappointed because when I got into the navy, the war was almost over and they weren't training sailors for active duty."

Thompson spent two years in the navy and played trumpet for the band while stationed on the East Coast. He then went to Queen's University for

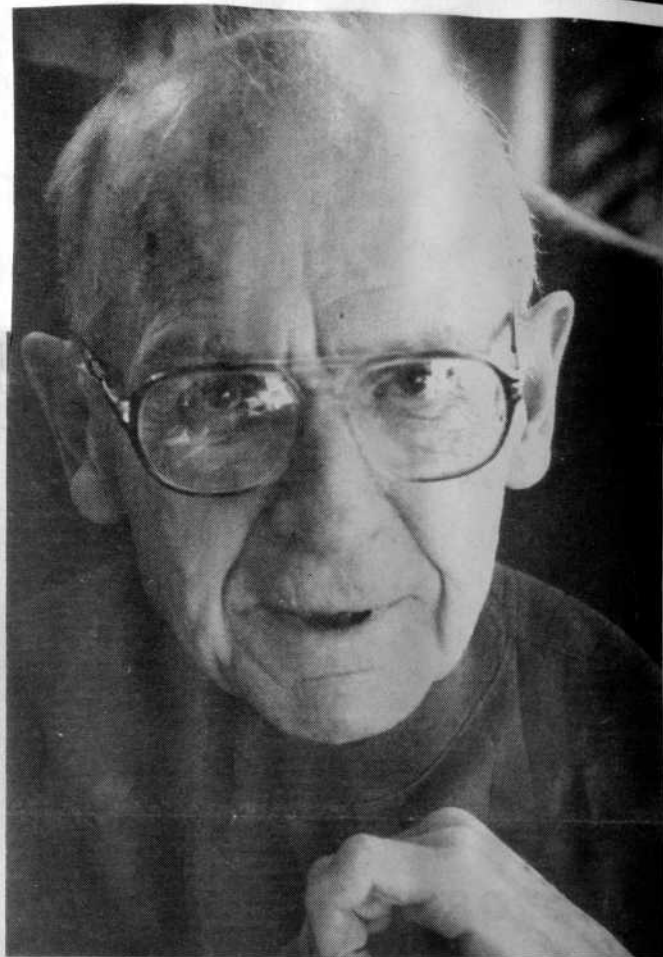


PHOTO - CROMBIE McNEILL

## George Thompson Centennial chief

STORY BY HENRY BURY, THE INTELLIGENCER

two years.

Thompson then embarked on a 37-year career with Bell Canada.

He started off in the equipment sales division in 1947 and got married in 1950. His job took the family to several cities, including Ottawa and Montreal, before coming to Belleville in 1969 as section manager.

In the early 1970s, Thompson was responsible for as many as 440 Bell Canada employees spread throughout the Quinte area. He was successful in persuading company officials to lease facilities in 1974 in the newly-built Century Place to bring his employees into a more centralized location.

Shortly after moving to Belleville, Thompson joined the board of directors of the Belleville and District Chamber of Commerce. It was during his stint as Chamber president that he worked quite closely with Robin Jeffrey, Belleville's mayor at the time.

It was Jeffrey who recruited Thompson in 1975 to chair the centennial committee. The committee spent the next three years and a budget of \$150,000

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