

Trites, Art

Art Trites readies to retire

His 'caretaking' job is Belleville's biggest

By BILL WHITELAW
Staff Reporter

Art Trites' first "ward" was city hall.

That was 14 years ago. Now he is responsible for ensuring that 25 city-owned buildings are kept in tip-top shape.

But at the end of December, Trites will be able to stop worrying about which roof is leaking or which furnace needs repair after he puts in his final day as city hall's property maintenance supervisor.

Although his is not a job that brings headlines, its importance is underscored by the responsibility it bears. Anything more than routine maintenance in any one of the 25 buildings comes to his immediate attention for equally swift action.

When Trites came on the job in 1970, he stepped into a newly-created position with duties that were only generally defined. Over the years, the scope of his responsibility has been brought into clearer focus and now the post bears a well-defined outline of where duties and responsibilities fall.

So just what exactly does the property maintenance supervisor do? Just about everything related to the care of municipal structures from energy-saving heating system conversions to maintaining the carillon that provides the music from city hall's clock tower.

There are also the annual reports on each building to be compiled, along with budget forecasts and tender specifications.

When he joined the city in 1970, city hall wasn't in the best of shape. In fact, a consultant's report suggested that unless major renovations were carried out, the building could soon become structurally unsound. When builder John Forin completed the structure nearly a century earlier,

he had employed 200 men for two years and spent a grand total of \$35,000.

To replace the building in 1970 would have cost between \$5 and \$6 million, said Trites. So, with cooperation from city council of the day, he set out to turn things around. Although major renovations are still planned, the building's structural strength is now "good for at least another 50 years," noted Trites.

The total bill in the last 14 years: Roughly half-a-million dollars.

One of the first changes he made was to the "four-faced liar", the nickname given to city hall's tower clock because once none of the hands ever gave the same time. Trites replaced the bulky weight mechanism that required frequent manual winding with a small electric motor. Now, he says, each of the clock's four faces keeps perfect time in synchronization.

But his city hall stint is really only his second career. The first - which lasted twice as long - left him well-prepared to look after maintenance. Trites spent nearly 30 years in the Royal Canadian Air Force, where as an aeronautical engineer several military aircraft came under his watch. He worked primarily on the CF-101 Voodoo, for years the air force's top fighter and was part of a team of specialists who co-ordinated the craft's purchase during the 1960s.

Now Trites is ready to put his working years behind him and spend some time enjoying the finer things of life. First there will be a one-month skiing holiday in Colorado with wife Beatrice, after which they plan to tour Mexico. The next few years will also bring plenty of golf and skiing.

"I'm not interested in working any more. After more than 40 years I figure that's it...from now on it's strictly pleasure."

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