

Matthews, Jim (Snipe)



Intelligencer photo by Frank O'Connor

Jim 'Snipe' Matthews (right) accepts Town Crier's uniform from Shirley Kelleher.

Town Crier's uniform at Wharf Street Debating Club

Kelleher's legacy lives on

By Bill Hunt *Shirley Feb 6/96*
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The voice that boomed throughout Belleville for years may be gone, but a donation made to the Wharf Street Debating Club Monday ensures former town crier Al Kelleher's cheery greeting will resonate for years to come.

One of at least 10 Town Crier uniforms owned by Kelleher was donated to the South Front Street club and will be kept there on display in a special case.

Kelleher, a long-time Wharf Street club member, was the city's official Town Crier until his death Aug. 1, 1995 at age 67.

The idea to donate the uniform came from Kelleher's family. His widow, Shirley, son Lyle and daughter-in-law Candy, were present for the official presentation at the club.

Club president Jim 'Snipe' Matthews accepted the uniform from Shirley.

Big Al, as he was called, became Belleville's official town crier in 1984, following a storied career as a letter carrier, when the province was celebrating the bicentennial of the arrival of the Loyalists. Then-mayor George Zegouras ordained Kelleher.

"I'd been to other communities where I'd seen they had Town Criers," recalls Zegouras.

He knew Kelleher both personally and through Kelleher's work as a long-time employee of Canada Post.

Zegouras says the position "almost became his full-time job," noting Kelleher welcomed many guests to the city including students participating in the Lahr (Germany) Friendship Program and many others.

"I know personally, I'm very grateful for his contribution to the community," says Zegouras, adding that children were particularly fond of the big man with the booming voice and broad grin who was a

fixture in local sports for decades, first playing and later officiating and coaching.

The first Crier's uniform was paid for by the Belleville Business Improvement Association and the City of Belleville, says Shirley, but Kelleher loved his clothes and had more made at his own expense.

A woman in Tweed made the first colorful outfit and Louise Gallaher, of Geddes Street, stitched together the other uniforms, notes Shirley.

It is Big Al's first uniform the Kelleher family donated to the club.

Following the official donation, the club's executive swore in a new member, Jack McBride, who appropriately knew Kelleher since the pair's high school days and were both avid sportsmen.

The club, beside providing a safe haven for skaters on Victoria Harbor in the winter months, is infamous for its traditional candidates' roast during municipal elections.