

Region chair Herrema dies

After a courageous five-year battle with cancer, Durham Region chairman Gary Herrema died Monday at the age of 56. He is survived by his wife Helen and three adult children, Ron, Howard and Elizabeth.

Mr. Herrema, a dairy farmer and former mayor of Uxbridge died peacefully with his family at his side, one week after taking a leave of absence from his regional post. In his long political career, which included serving as chairman of Durham Region for 14 years, he served and headed many committees such as vice-chairman of GO Transit, a post he held for many years.

His peers at the 34-member Durham council re-elected Mr. Herrema over and over as chairman.



He also carried the banner for the Liberals in a federal election in 1984, but was not elected. Although a strong Grit, he attracted the respect of people of all political stripes.

Born in Holland, his family immigrated to the area when Mr. Herrema was six years old. His death has saddened an entire community.

Walter Beath, a retired Ashburn farmer and the only other regional chairman in the region's history, said, "Gary was an absolute people person. Gary Herrema knew everyone, and it didn't matter where they came from."

GARY HERREMA He said he "left us with a great many friends. He will be sadly missed." Beath noted that Mr. Herrema was an ardent worker and did many great things for Durham Region.

Alex Shepherd, MP for Durham Region said Herrema was "always dedicated to all of the people of Durham. Because he came from humble farm beginnings, that part of his life taught him how to deal with people and with human problems."

Regional councillor Susan Para said he "treated his fellow politicians with professionalism and a great deal of caring."

"He knew the region like nobody else," Para said.

Bev Northeast, Uxbridge councillor, said "as politicians, we didn't always agree with him, but we always respected him. He would never back down and in the end you knew he was always right."

York Region chairman Eldred King, who knew Mr. Herrema since the 1950s, marvelled at his commanding presence. He said, "it didn't matter whether he was speaking at a tractor pull, a political forum or someone's anniversary party, he always said the right thing."

King said he was the only politician he knew who could enter a room and just by his "sheer presence" announce it was time to begin. Mr. Herrema is resting at the Low and Low Funeral Home in Port Perry. Visitation will be at the Port Perry Funeral Chapel from 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday (tonight) and 2 to 4 and 7 to 9 p.m. on Wednesday. The funeral will be at the Trinity United Church in Uxbridge on Thursday at 2 p.m. Interment is at the Foster Memorial grounds, north of Uxbridge. Donations to the Uxbridge Cottage Hospital are appreciated.

~ Joan Ransberry

Sunderland Historical Society & Museum

Regional Chairman Gary Herrema dies



Gary Herrema, Durham Region's chairman for the past 15 years, passed away quietly at his home Monday afternoon following a lengthy battle with cancer.

Mr. Herrema recently took an indefinite leave of absence from his duties at the region.

No further information was available at press time.