

# 'WHAT A TREASURE WE HAD'

## PARA SPORTS CHAMPION JOINS SPORTS HALL OF FAME

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It is far too easy to reduce the impact of COVID to numbers — cases, hospitalizations, deaths.

But each death represents the loss of a family member, a friend, and in the case of Barb Montemurro, all of those and a dedicated volunteer and champion for para sports.

Jon Hurst worked with Montemurro on the Town of Halton Hills' accessibility committee for



Montemurro family photo

The late Barbara Montemurro carries the Canadian flag into the Stoke Mandeville World Wheelchair Games in 1990. She's among the four inductees of the Halton Hills Sports Hall of Fame's 2022 class.

more than a decade.

"Barb was the heart and soul of our committee. She was so funny," Hurst said. "She loved being there. She felt she could make a difference."

While Hurst said it was clear from the meetings that Montemurro was very knowledgeable and brought a wealth of experience, she never brought up her background. It wasn't until her

death in January 2021 that he fully realized "what a treasure we had."

Montemurro, who was previously named to the Hall of Fame for the Ontario Wheelchair Sport Association (2008) and the Canadian Wheelchair Sport Association (2017), will now join the 2022 class for the Halton Hills Sports Hall of Fame.

She will be joined by Sandy

Chapman, Chris Sargent and the Georgetown District High School swim team.

In the mid-'70s, Montemurro answered an ad in the paper looking for volunteers for Variety Village. Soon after she volunteered at the Paralympics in Toronto in 1976, which was the beginning of a decades-long career in sports. She joined the Ontario Wheelchair Sport Association, where she held a variety of roles including secretary, sport technical adviser and senior athletics director before becoming president.

Former Canadian Paralympic Committee president David Legg said it was Montemurro who hired him for what he called his first "real" job with Ontario Wheelchair Sports Association.

"I am eternally indebted to her for her mentorship, leadership and mostly just her kindness," he wrote on Facebook. "She was one of the most genuine and authentic people I've ever met."

A dedicated Toronto Argonauts fan — she had season tickets for 70 years — Montemurro worked to promote a similar sport that could be adapted to wheelchair sports. Originally

known as murderball, Montemurro would arrange for pickup games and demonstrations for athletes at the various local and international competitions she attended (including three Paralympics).

She would later serve as manager for both the provincial and Canadian junior teams, work as an official at the national level, and was in Atlanta when wheelchair rugby made its debut as a demonstration sport at the 1996 Paralympics, with Canada taking the silver medal.

"She liked how genuine the people were," said her daughter Sharon English.

Along her travels she met Queen Elizabeth, Prince Charles, Sarah Ferguson and Bob Hope.

Even when an eye infection caused her sight to deteriorate, Montemurro never slowed her efforts to help others.

"Nothing really stopped her," said her son Scott.

"You realize she was so accomplished outside her community, but also did so much inside her community," Hurst said. He added she was a quiet heroine for people with disabilities.

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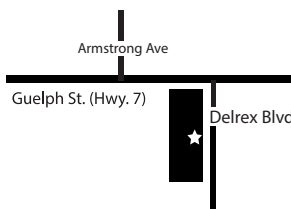
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