

Former councillor remembered as true gentleman



FILE PHOTO BY GRAHAM PAINE

Upon leaving politics, Art Melanson reflects on his career with some items from a folder including the 1986 council resolution to bring the big water pipe to Milton.

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Long time colleagues of former Milton councillor Art Melanson, who died this past Sunday morning at 83, remember the Nova Scotia native as an athletic, hardworking, compassionate "gentleman."

"He will be missed," said Mayor Gord Krantz, who served on council with Melanson throughout his entire quarter century as the Ward 2 representative, 1969-78 and 1985-2003.

"In my opinion, he certainly made a big contribution to the community. If anything that Art would ever be remembered for, not only in his public life but his private life and business life, he was truly a gentleman. He was a very kind individual, for sure, very businesslike. I never heard him say a bad word about anybody."

Krantz recalled Melanson as a political ally, who shared the same vision for growth of Milton. Both were staunch supporters during the 1980s and 1990s for the extension of the so-called 'Big Pipe' to Milton, which brought water up from Lake Ontario and sewage back down to Oakville.

After it was completed at the beginning of this decade, the Big Pipe opened the floodgates to development in Milton, which had seen growth essentially frozen since 1987.

"Art and I... more often than not, our thinking was much along the same lines, keeping what we thought was for the betterment of Milton, not only for the short term but for the long term," Krantz said.

The mayor said that similarity was likely due to the fact both were small businessmen in downtown Milton. Melanson worked much of his life at Bus Knight's Men's Wear, working his way up from employee to partner to sole owner.

"Both of us being Main-Streeters, we were in touch with the people for sure through our small business enterprises."

Melanson respectful

One of the major opponents to the Big Pipe, Ward 1 Councillor Rick Day started on council at the same time as Melanson. He said he respected his fellow town councillor as an "old fashioned gentleman" and was proud of their friendship even though they sometimes held differences of opinion.

"He treated everybody and everyone with respect and cordiality," Day recalled. "And as a councillor he did his homework, and spoke only from the heart and always honestly and with conviction and never, never with a hidden agenda or any other kind of ulterior purpose. He would never grandstand or take advantage in any way."

"On some issues he and I disagreed. But on 90 per cent of them, we agreed. And on the ones we disagreed on, he was partially right and I was partially right."

Melanson was also noted as an advocate for Milton Transit before the town had any bus system in place.

"And one of his goals there too was affordable housing," said Krantz, who believes Melanson's strong Catholic faith informed his compassionate approach.

"He always had (wanted) the person that maybe wasn't quite as well off as others to get a hand up, instead of a hand out. He believed in that philosophy."

What drove Melanson, already a member of service organizations including the Milton Kinsmen Club and the church's Knights of Columbus, to spend long hours after work as a 'part-time' councillor still puzzles his wife of 45 years, Dolores (nee Dingman).

"I have absolutely no idea because we would get calls at all times of the day or night," the 67-year-old said laughing in an interview Tuesday. "It was just silly little stuff but at all hours so that's the reason I really didn't like it, but he seemed to just thrive on it."

"He just wanted the town to grow and he used to say that to me: 'I want

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