

Lee retires to make room for those 'somewhat younger'

By Christina Commisso
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

Barry Lee never aspired to be a politician, and after representing Miltonians for more than two decades on town council, he still doesn't consider himself a politician.

"Grand standing is something that politicians have to do to a certain extent, but I never felt comfortable doing it," said Lee, who for the past 22 years has been the voice of Milton's rural residents, first as a local councillor for Ward 3, and then as a regional councillor.

This year, for the first time in eight municipal elections, voters won't find Lee's name on the ballot.

"I'm getting old. I've been going at it for 22 years and it's time to move on. I wanted to open it up for people that are somewhat younger," said Lee on his retirement.

His entrance into politics was unconventional. After complaining to Town Hall about the lack of weed control along the dusty roadsides in rural Milton, the farmer took his complaint to council, where he made a delegation before Mayor Gord Krantz.

Neighbours and friends later encouraged Lee to run for a position on council. In 1989

he ran, won the seat, and hasn't looked back since.

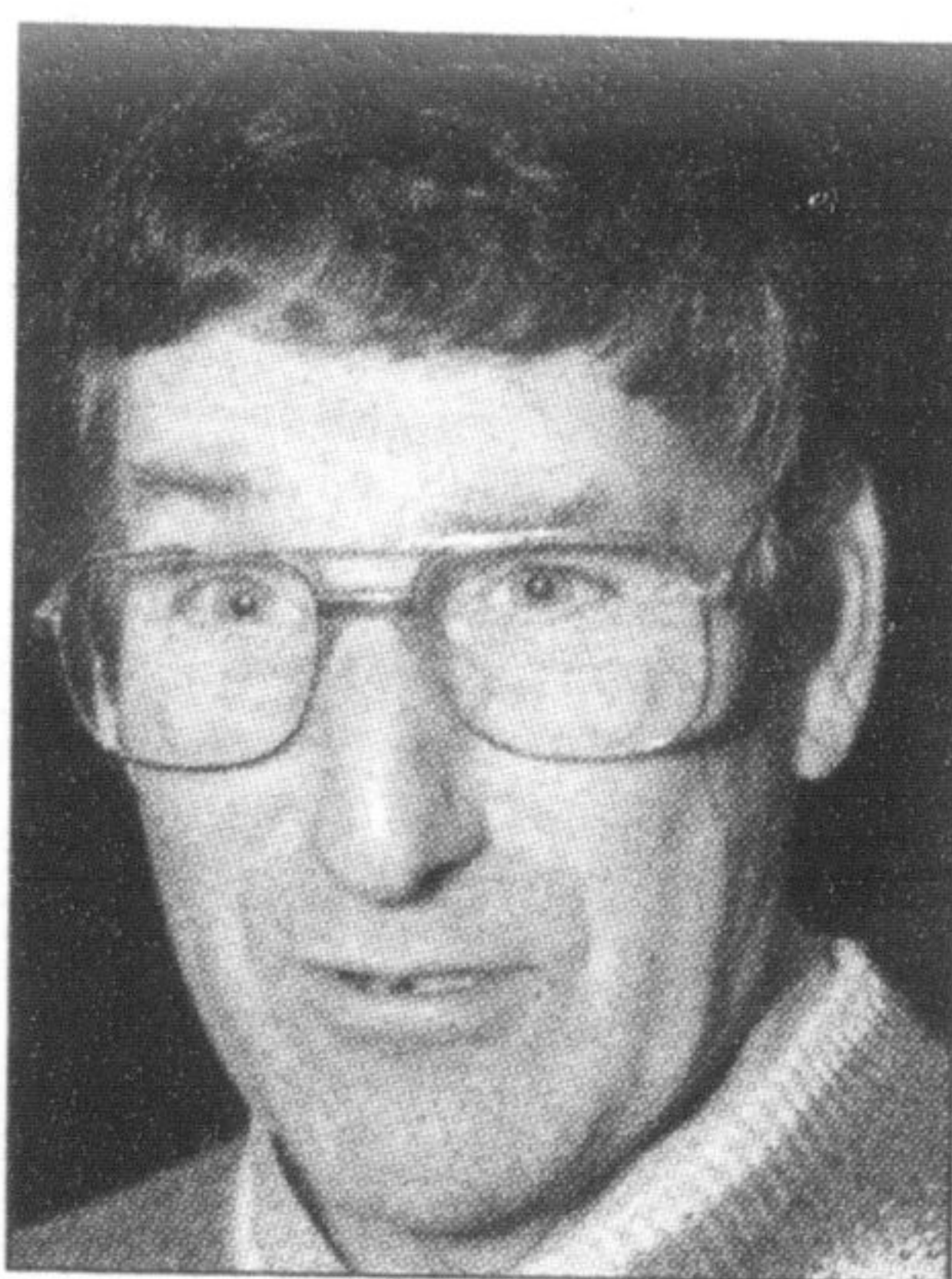
"I've always been interested and believed in local government. It's absolutely critical that people pay attention to it," he said. "It's the government that most affects the people and it's the government that provides the best value."

Despite his passion for local issues, Lee has decided to call it quits.

"I'm pushing 71, and there are some things that I haven't been able to attend to. I still have two farms that I'm operating and I always seem to be behind."

One of the most important things Lee has worked on during his time around the council table was the preservation of Nassagaweya.

"It's a very unique community," he said of the rural township. "We put planning prin-



Barry Lee

ciples in place that ensured Nassagaweya would remain as it is."

His biggest accomplishment also coincides with one of his biggest blunders, when Lee made a comment about newcomers integrating in the rural area during an all-candidates meeting.

"I went a little too far and said that those who don't integrate can go back to Oakville or Mississauga," Lee recalled. "I got a letter from a gentleman who came from Oakville. He said he didn't vote for me, but I was still responsible for representing him."

Lee paid the gentleman a visit and further explained his position. "I was able to work with him and we became extremely close friends. From then on he was one of my most loyal supporters."

"That's the gratifying part of politics. You don't necessarily agree with each other, and there's a difference of opinion, but we must respect each other's differences."

Lee said he's happy that rural Milton hasn't been left out of the decision-making process at Town Hall while he has sat on council. "We are very fortunate up here. The people are a distinct separate entity compared to urban Milton. The enclave won't change when Milton becomes a city. The

Town has shared the wealth, created parks in Nassagaweya, the road system has much improved, and Town staff is very co-operative to share what's going on so we're not left out of the loop."

Lee said the new council will have to continue to work on planning issues while tailoring growth, "to preserve the identity of what Milton is."

Looking back on some of his bigger accomplishments, which include preventing a sharp increase in hydro rates in rural Milton and aiding in the Halton landfill site negotiations, Lee said he's reminded of what a great community Milton is comprised of.

"I've always been impressed, on all the issues I've dealt with, with how willing people are to come forward and participate."

While he'll no longer be a fixture at town and regional council meetings, Lee said he'd like to stay involved in Milton's decision-making process, just in a different capacity.

"I've had a lot of fun along the way and made tremendous life-long friends through this. Together, we got the job done."

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