

## FORMER PRIME MINISTER TURNS ON IRISH CHARM TO WOO CONSERVATIVE VOTERS



At a Tory fundraiser in York Region, Brian Mulroney delighted supporters with his energy and passion.

## Powerful, persuasive man

At home in front of a crowd, Brian Mulroney brings presence to the party's image

BY PATRICK CASEY  
Staff Writer

Seven years after retiring as Canada's prime minister, amidst the anger and indignation of Canadians from coast to coast, Brian Mulroney spent 70 minutes last week demonstrating the various degrees of charm, charisma and wit that first captured the imagination of voters upon his arrival as Tory leader in 1983.

In a speech five minutes shorter than his record address on the Meech Lake Accord, Mulroney induced a series of standing ovations as he addressed partisan politics to a fundraising crowd gathered in support of Markham MP Jim Jones.

Facing an intense media glare assembled at Markham's Angus Glen Golf Club last Friday, Mulroney used the platform to touch on a variety of topics, including a set of financial figures in support of free trade, a low inflation policy and the dreaded GST — his so-called economic trilogy.

Maybe it was his time away from the political battlefield that helped his impressive performance, or perhaps it was the 15-page speech that began with a string of jokes and one-liners that comprised the opening 13 minutes of his monologue, his jagged arrow aimed directly at Canadian Alliance leadership, hopeful Preston Manning and Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

As he demonstrated his ease with the microphone, there was an unshakable



Brian Mulroney, flanked by wife Mila and son Nicholas, met with York Region Tories last week.

mental image of Mulroney and wife Mila, standing alongside former United States President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy, crooning *When Irish Eyes are Smiling*.

"He really is a pro when it comes to working a crowd and making a speech," commented Markham Mayor Don Cousens, who joined Markham MPP David Tsubouchi and Thornhill MPP Tina Molinari at last week's luncheon. "He's very powerful, and very persuasive."

For a press corps hardened by such wisecrack antics, Mulroney managed to enlist a chuckle or two from the scribes last week, huddled at the back of a makeshift tent overlooking the posh course's 18th

green.

He began with a string of stingers against Manning, whom he blamed for the fragmentation of the federal Tories, while promising not to change his Western image upon arriving in Ottawa.

"Mr. Manning, I'm sure he's a fine fellow, but I have never met the man," said Mulroney. "But he has had his hair done, his eyes done, his nose done and his voice done."

Mulroney also remembered the former Reform Party leader's threat to turn Stornoway — the official residence of the opposition — into a giant bingo hall if Reform earned opposition honours in the last federal election.

His sharpest comments, however, were reserved for Prime Minister Jean Chretien, casting him as "unbelievable" for his recent tour of the Middle East, joking Chretien believed Fettucine Alfredo is the President of Italy.

In a media scrum afterwards, Mulroney clearly indicated the day's event was a one-shot deal and he has no inclination to return full-time to politics. In fact, Mulroney was named interim CEO of Sun Media yesterday, as Paul Godfrey announced his resignation.

His position was in stark contrast to his host.

Minutes after listening to Mulroney's rallying cry, Jones refused — yet again — to confirm his intention to stay with the federal Tories or follow the lead of others and bolt to the Alliance. His actions continue to cast Jones as the non-committal politician, appearing to wait until the results of the Alliance's June 24 leadership convention before making his next move.



Joan Ransberry

## Mean spirited to speak ill of the dead

"Don't kill the dead" is an old Irish saying. It ought to be a rule.

Two weeks ago, Chris Pagani, a 17-year-old Stouffville youth, was recovered from Lake Scugog. It was a week after he disappeared in a canoeing accident.

His 16-year-old fishing partner and friend struggled to save Chris, but despite his efforts, Chris slipped beneath the water's surface and died.

I didn't know Chris Pagani. But, from all accounts, it's obvious: Chris Pagani was special. A good looking boy.

Chris had a glint in his eye, a kick in his walk and a wonderful Tom Sawyer grin. Chris Pagani was a tin-can-kicking kind of guy. He was easy to love, fun to know and hard to lose.

A trip to Stouffville District Secondary School said it all. It was a school in mourning. Students, teachers and the principal were in tears.

I visited the Pagani's home twice. Losing a child is the worst of human pain. It cut through Janet Pagani like a knife.

While I was with Janet, I put my job aside. I was just another mom.

I've raised five imperfect children. My kids have done some wonderful things. And they've done stupid things.

While teens, my children were in life threatening, embarrassing and simply asinine situations. Yet, if I lost one of my babies, my heart would break.

I was touched by the show of concern shown to Janet Pagani. The most supportive were the teenagers, especially the boys. As most of us know, a teenager's grief is a special grief. It's mixed with profound sadness, anger, guilt and confusion. It hurts. It's hard to understand and it feels like it'll last forever.

Last week, at the Stouffville council meeting, both Councillor Peter Dobrich and political hopeful Fred Robins exhibited a marked lack of human understanding.

A delegation of teenagers made a formal request for permission to put up a mural at the skateboard park to honour Chris Pagani's memory.

The request should have been granted and the delegation thanked for wanting to honour a special friend.

Dobrich, who's smart as a whip when it comes to money matters, panned the mural, suggesting it's not fair to others who have died in an untimely manner.

Meanwhile, he hinted that Pagani's lifestyle was not always up to his standards.

Robins suggested the drowning is an example of why young people should make better choices. He also stressed that we don't build murals for others. So, why this one?

For some reason, Robins then reminded us all that, in life, Chris Pagani made mistakes.

The comments were not only silly, they were mean-spirited. When someone has died, drop the judgmental holier-than-thou attitude.

And remember: Don't kill the dead.

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