

Life stories

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Hilton Wilson left 'huge mark' on Kleinburg

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Hilton Wilson was well known as a highly regarded educator who was passionate about his Kleinburg community, sports and gardening.

Those who knew him best will also tell you that he marched to the beat of his own drummer.

"I would do things a certain way, but Hilton would never, ever do it that way. He'd have a way of his own," his wife, Gail Wilson, said.

Born in 1941, Hilton Wilson grew up Goderich, the second youngest of six children.

His mother worked as a teacher, while his father was a general labourer.

"They didn't have a lot of money, so he grew up doing things for himself," Gail said.

After high school, Wilson headed to teachers' college in Hamilton, eventually landing a job teaching elementary school in Etobicoke.

Wilson spent his summer vacations working toward a bachelor's degree, with a double major in Math and English, at the University of Western Ontario in London.

That's where, in 1964, he met Gail, also working toward a degree.

The couple married in 1965 and he took the next year off from teaching to finish his degree.

A passionate educator, Wilson eventually earned a masters in education from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, at University of Toronto.

He also helped write a reading

series for young children and dedicated a lot of time to research on childhood development, Gail said.

In 1969, the couple moved to Kleinburg, where they started a family.

Wilson was the proud father of two boys, Jeff and Brent.

It was through coaching his sons' T-ball teams that Wilson first became involved in the community.

From there, he joined the legion of volunteers who help out with the annual Binder Twine Festival, starting out in the booth selling the infamous Kleinburgers, french fries and onion rings.

He quickly became a key member of the organizing committee, on which he served for 20 years including two as chairperson.

"He played a huge role on the Friday night setting up. During the day, he was the go-to person on the Saturday (and) on Sunday cleanup, he was always there," said longtime friend Bob Klein. "He was just the go-to guy."

Wilson was also a founding member of the Kleinburg Old Boys, a local volunteer group that established and runs a small museum at Klein House dedicated to preserving the village's history.

"He just liked to know what was going on (in the community) and he didn't like when things weren't handled properly so he liked to be in there, getting it done," Gail said. "He was a get-it-done person."

Though he had no formal computer training, many people knew Wilson as the man to call if your machine was acting up.



Hilton Wilson passed away in March at age 73 after making a 'huge mark' on Kleinburg.

"If anyone had a computer problem and they'd call Hilton and he'd go and, usually, could solve it," Gail said. "He loved solving problems."

He was never one who sought the limelight.

"His friend Ron (Pearson) said recently that Hilton did so many things for Binder Twine that they didn't realize because he just did those things," Gail recalled. "He never really wanted to stand out. He just quietly did things."

Along with his passion for Kleinburg, Wilson loved sports – especially baseball, basketball and golf.

He had Blue Jays season tickets for many years. And after retiring in 1997 as principal at Bloorlea Middle School, Wilson took up his golf clubs with gusto.



Wearing a Kleinburg Binder Twine Festival button, Hilton Wilson could always be found setting up the community festival, cleaning up or generally getting things done. Whether it was gardening, sports, a community event or his family, he was a 'go-to' and 'get it done' guy.

He also took charge of organizing regular golf games for the Kleinburg Old Boys, Klein said.

Wilson was fond of gardening, too, tending his massive vegetable garden. His tomato and wave petunia plants were sold at the Kleinburg Old Boys annual fundraising plant sale in May.

Wilson was also a devoted grandfather to his four granddaughters – Madison, Avery, Sofie and Ellie.

Last summer, Wilson was diagnosed with leukemia, but it went

into remission and he was released from hospital, Gail said.

A short time later, he developed a rare form of blood cancer called hemophagocytic lymphohistiocytosis (HLH).

Wilson died at Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto March 25 at age 73.

"If you were a friend of Hilton's, you were a friend for life. He was that type of guy," Klein said. "I still have a hard time believing he's gone. He left a huge mark on Kleinburg."

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