

Life stories

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Al Stephenson honoured for his community efforts

BY TIM KELLY
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It comes as absolutely no surprise when Gail Stephenson shows a visitor her breathtakingly beautiful backyard, full of flowers and other flora.

One would expect nothing less from one of Woodbridge's leading horticulturalists. With her late husband Al, who passed away on New Year's Day in 2015 at age 78, Gail is known for her dedication to keeping Woodbridge beautiful.

It's impossible to separate the two, so it was fitting a plaque placed on the Woodbridge bridge last October in memory of Al also recognized Gail for the efforts the pair has made over the decades to make Woodbridge shine.

To honour Al's efforts, a tree was also planted in his honour last summer in Armstrong Park, near the bridge, and a plaque that says, "Al Stephenson, a friend and gar-



dener," is seen on a nearby rock in the park.

In October 2015, members of Vaughan council turned out in force to pay tribute to the couple when the plaque was unveiled on the bridge where the pair had placed beautiful flowerpots over many years.

The plaque reads: "In appreciation of Al and Gail Stephenson and the Woodbridge Horticultural Society's ongoing effort to make Woodbridge a more beautiful place."

It's clear, based on the feeling in her voice and the scrapbook she proudly shows a visitor, that Gail is pleased with the tribute, espe-

cially to Al.

Then again, giving of himself was nothing new to the longtime Toronto firefighter, who spent more than three decades on the big-city force.

"One of the things I heard from so many people at the (funeral) service was all the things he did for them," said Gail.

For instance, Al would make trips to pick up bottles of maple syrup that he brought with him on his journeys to watch NASCAR races in the United States. He gave the Canadian delicacy to American buddies in places such as Charlotte and Michigan.

Another thing Al liked to do, said Gail, was order 30 or 35 loaves of cherry bread every year from a Port Perry bakery and sausages from an Elmira butcher and give the food away to friends.

"He did a lot of different things that people would tell me about later. He was very generous like that, helping others," she said.

Gail said one of Al's closest friends tells of the time the pair was in the U.S. south just before the American Thanksgiving when Al asked a waitress what she was doing for the traditional holiday. When she said she wasn't doing anything, he reached into his wallet and gave her all the money she needed to buy a turkey and all the fixings for a family dinner.

Gail and Al enjoyed travelling, though Al didn't like the big cities.

"He loved towns and villages and just chatting with the local people in the post office," Gail said.

In the 18 months he has been gone, Gail said it has been hard, because, "we always did everything together," but, "I have to keep it going, otherwise I would go crazy." She says that, "friends and family have been great and the stories people have told about Al have really helped.

"We had such a wonderful life," she said.

SPORTS

Golfer withdraws from world event

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
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When Gajan Sivabalasingham takes to the fairways to play a competitive round of golf, he feels he's at his best when all facets of his game are in sync.

Feeling all of those elements are not totally in place these days, the 22-year-old Ballantrae resident withdrew from the 16th FISU world university golf championships in Brive-la-Gaillarde, France from June 23 to 26.

Originally chosen as one of six student-athletes to represent Canada in the competition, featuring the top student-athletes from around the world, Sivabalasingham was looking forward to making his second appearance in the games after making his debut in 2012 when it was held in the Czech Republic.

But citing there are family matters far more important, he informed the Canadian coaching staff last week of his decision to pass.

"I really wanted to go," Sivabalasingham said from his Ballantrae residence after returning with his University of Waterloo men's and women's golf team from their participation at the Canadian University/College Championships in British Columbia. "But I wasn't comfortable and if I'm not 100 per cent I don't want to play."

Should Sivabalasingham regain his form for the remainder of the season, he's pondering a decision to turn professional.

Bain ties for second in Innisfil

Adam Bain finished in a two-way tie in second place at the Canadian Junior Golf Association's Georgian College Junior Series at National Pines Golf Club near Innisfil Sunday.

Entered in the Juvenile Boys U17 division, the Stouffville resident carded rounds of 80 and 87 to finish at 23-over par 167.

Bain and Andrew Gognavec of Parry Sound finished 11 shots behind winner Eli Mathew of Waterloo, who was 12-over at 156.

NASCAR race rained out in Quebec

The Stouffville-based Team T3R/EHR racing team with Jason Hathaway driving the Fast Eddie/Choko/HGC Chevrolet was looking forward to taking to the track for the NASCAR Pinty's CRS Express 300 race at Autodrome Chaudiere in Vallee-Jonction, Que. last Saturday.

Mother Nature, however, had a bigger say. With a forecast of rain throughout the weekend, the race was rescheduled for June 24.

The NASCAR Pinty's Series is scheduled to resume this Saturday at Sunset Speedway in Innisfil for the Leland Industries 300 presented by Dickies.

To date, the series has conducted just one race. Hathaway finished in ninth place.

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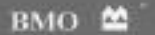


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