

## Stouffville Home To On-ice Legends

By Maurice Smith

Bring up the subject of ice skating with most people in Whitchurch-Stouffville and like most Canadians, I imagine, their mind immediately turns to hockey - perhaps shinny on a pond or at a local rink.

Not so, however, if your last name is Hyland. Ice skating, as Bruce and Margaret Hyland know it, is figure skating, which was founded in the late 1700s about a hundred years before a black rubber disc was chased over ice by people carrying sticks.

Figure skating reached its pinnacle in North America after the Second World War, during the same period the Hylands hit their peak.

Their involvement in the sport started when Bruce, a prominent roller skater at the time, was asked by a friend to try dancing on ice skates. He was a natural and soon paired up with a beautiful young lady, Margaret Roberts.

In 1947 they would become the first ever Canadian national ice dance champions. In 1949, when the Toronto Skating Club was looking for a professional dance coach, they asked Bruce to switch from being a competitive skater to take on the position. Bruce agreed and he and Margaret, who would marry in 1957, soon hit their stride, becoming prominent leaders in the business. For more than two decades they were the power and go-to couple in the Canadian ice skating profession.

Those who knew them during that time indicate they were unmatched in stature, public image and appearance. As the late Toller Cranston told me, "Margaret was always so positive, well appointed, glamorous and best of all, one great talent".

The professional skaters who came under their tutelage read like a list of the who's who of the skating world. All this during the most important, and as most will confirm, peak, golden age of ice skating.

Debbi Wilkes and Guy Revell, Kurt Browning, Donald Jackson, Brian Orser, Elizabeth Manley and Peggy Fleming, just to name a few, flourished and rose to the podium under their guidance. They trained and coached their students to the Olympics on five different occasions. They were the coaches for Maria and Otto Jelinek when they claimed the World Championship in 1961 and 1962. They were there when Wilkes and Revell won Olympic silver and world bronze in 1964. Many other skaters from around the world came to Canada to seek fame under their guidance.

I interviewed seven-time Canadian men's champion

Toller Cranston for this article shortly before he died in January of this year. He said that the following episode took place between him and Margaret Hyland during the World Championships in Yugoslavia in 1970 after Toller had fallen during one of his early performances.

Margaret, taking him aside, convinced him that falling at the Worlds was simply not an option and then added, "you are not to do it again". Those few comments resonated and were taken so seriously by him that he would go on to perform many more times at the Worlds, and never fall again.

When the Olympic journey ended for the Hylands, after a twenty year stint, they toured professionally throughout Canada, the United States, South Africa and Japan. They then produced skating shows that were performed in Japan, Hawaii, Peking and Montreal's Expo 67.

With the end of their coaching of figure skaters came a slight change in direction. They started a power skating school which became the largest in Canada, having over 3,000 students at one time. A number of ex-NHL players attended including Kent Douglas, both the Mahovlich brothers and Paul Henderson. The techniques the Hylands developed and taught are still used in the training of many elite hockey players.

From 1983 through 2001 they organized and produced ice shows, year round, in the interior of Countryside Mall, in Clearwater, Florida.

In 1994 they were inducted into the Canadian Figure Skating Hall of Fame, as both coaches and builders of the sport.

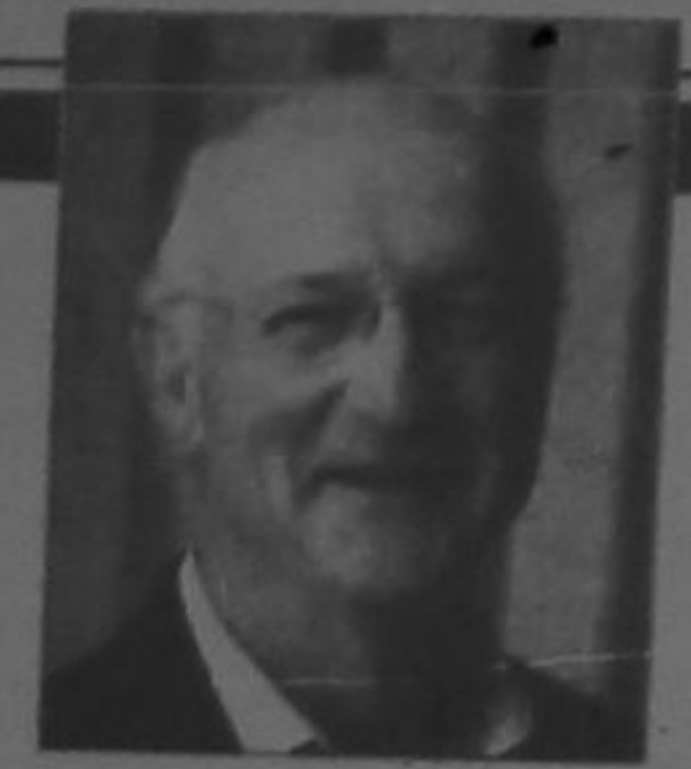
When the Air Canada Centre opened in 1999, Bruce and Margaret were front and centre. They were presented to the audience as "National champions and legends in the ice skating world."

In 2014 they were again feted, this time in Ottawa, during the events surrounding the 100th anniversary of the founding of The Canadian Figure Skating Association - now Skate Canada.

As Toller Cranston told me, "The real legacy the Hylands left upon retiring was that they were recognized as a friend to all their fellow skating associates; whether competitor or student."

Yes, these ice skating legends live in Whitchurch-Stouffville.

Maurice Smith can be reached at: [mauricefp@rogers.com](mailto:mauricefp@rogers.com)



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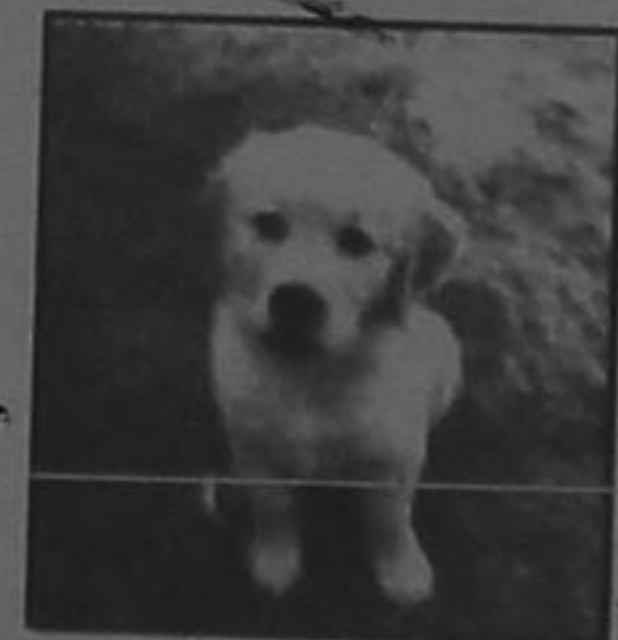
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Stouffville residents Margaret and Bruce Hyland, who became the first-ever Canadian ice dance champions in 1947, have coached some of the sport's biggest stars.

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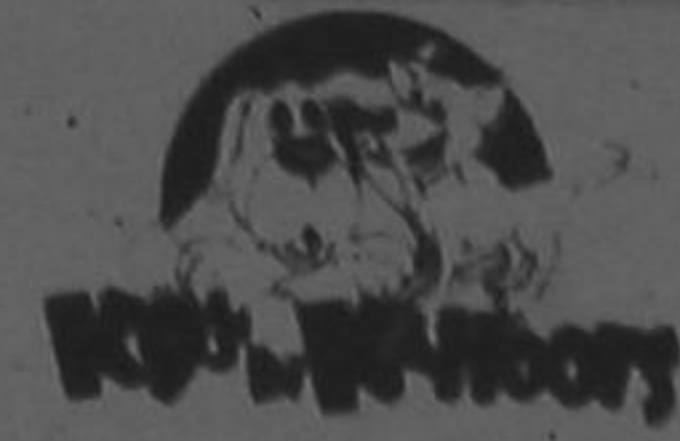


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