

Community pays tribute to Betty De Bartolo on retirement



Love was all around at Slabtown Armoury on Friday evening as community leaders gathered to pay tribute to Betty De Bartolo on her retirement.

De Bartolo, who has served as Executive Assistant to the Mayor of Aurora through two mayors and four Council terms, was celebrated by all levels of government last week as politicians and residents at large shared how she touched their lives.

The woman of the hour, who was joined at the celebration by her husband, mother, and children, along with friends and those who mentored her along the way, first became involved in municipal politics as assistant to long-time City of Toronto councillor Howard Moscoe. She came to the Town of Aurora in the first year of Geoffrey Dawe's time as Mayor in 2010, and continued in the role under Mayor Tom Mrakas until November 14.

"It's great to be here to celebrate someone who's meant so much, not just to me, but to this entire organization and the entire Town," said Mayor Mrakas. "In this role, you learn very quickly that you can't do it alone; you need people who keep things moving, keep you organized, keep you grounded, and, frankly, keep you sane. For me, that person has been Betty.

"She was so much more than an Executive Assistant. Her unwavering support, wisdom, and kindness left a lasting impact, and I'm profoundly grateful for all that she's given. For over seven years, she has been the steady influence that I deeply respect. She offered support, provided perspective, and spoke with candor when I needed it the most. No matter what we were dealing with – the long days, the tough issues, the chaos, we always found a way to have fun."

De Bartolo, he continued, "made sure residents were heard, emails were answered, and that the Town stayed connected even in the toughest moments."

"You've been more than a colleague, you've been family – you supported me, this office, and this Town in ways most people will never see: quietly, professionally and with a level of dedication that's rare. I'll miss your steady presence, your straight-up advice, your humour, but more than all that, I'll miss you."

Before Mayor Mrakas took to the podium, tributes were paid by former Aurora mayor Tim Jones and former councillor Steve Hinder, speaking on behalf of the annual Mayor's Golf Tournament, which raises funds to support the community, as well as Moscoe himself, and Lina Bigioni, Chief of Staff for the Region of York.

"Betty's career has been nothing short of remarkable," said Bigioni. "She has served as Executive Assistant to several mayors of Aurora, each with their own style, pace and, let's be honest, quirks. And she handled every one of them with the same calm, professionalism and good humor that we all know so well.

"In my role as Chief of Staff at the Region of York, I have worked and continue to work with many Executive Assistants across the Region. To me, Betty has become the gold standard of what it means to be a true public servant. She is the quiet constant behind the scenes, ensuring the details are right, the meetings are organized and the people around her are taken care of " and she's done it all with a kindness and composure that make everyone feel valued."

Another quality of De Bartolo's that Bigioni recognized was her heart.

"For those of us who've had the pleasure of working with Betty, we know she has been far more than a colleague. She's been a confidant, a sounding board and often the calm in the storm". Her loyalty runs deep, her laughter is contagious and her kindness has a way of filling every room she enters. As you step into retirement, I only hope you take it with you the same joy you've given to all of us. But with fewer emails, a lot more coffee dates, and perhaps a few mornings where you don't have to organize anyone's schedule!?"

Following a video tribute, which was led by a tongue-in-cheek presentation from Ward 6 Councillor Harold Kim, it was left to De Bartolo to have the final word.

"I began my career in politics with Howard more than 25 years ago," she recalled. "He was my mentor, and through his guidance, I developed a passion for municipal government and public service. Howard taught me the importance of understanding policy, interpreting legislation and process, and using that knowledge to advocate for those who may not have a voice". It's a lesson that has stayed with me throughout my entire career, one that I value just as much today.

"As difficult as it was to attend Howard's retirement, it ultimately led me to the Town of Aurora. And to former mayor Geoff Dawe, thank you for the opportunity you gave me, and for introducing me to Aurora " a truly special place with an equally special community. For those that are standing here, that means all of you. Your leadership and vision and steady hand guided the Town through a period of extraordinary growth, and it was an honor to work alongside you for almost two terms."

After paying tribute to colleagues, including Bigioni and Kelly Gobbels, who serves as Executive Assistant to Aurora CAO Doug Nadorozny, De Bartolo turned her attention to the man who was her boss until a few short hours before.

"You work tirelessly engaging with residents and advocating for this community, making Aurora the best place to live and work. It has been a privilege to work alongside you " and I admit, keeping up with you is now a small task. There has never been a dull moment. Never. And as hard as we've worked, I wouldn't change a thing. I've enjoyed every single minute.

Thank you for always making me feel valued and heard, even when that meant listening to my unsolicited advice, or engaging in a debate or two". Thank you for this most incredible send-off. It just truly means the world to me. Once again, thank you all for being here and for being a part of my journey. I am so grateful for all the memories, and I am excited for what comes next."

By Brock Weir
Editor
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter