

Former Councillor John Abel dies at 64



By Brock Weir

John Abel is being remembered as a man with a passion.

Mr. Abel died in hospital Thursday afternoon at 4.45 p.m. at the age of 64, surrounded by his wife Tracy, family, and close friends, his family confirms to The Auroran.

He had been hospitalized since Sunday after collapsing at home, little over 24 hours after his eight-year time as Aurora's Deputy Mayor, a position he retained over two consecutive terms, came to a close.

His final act of giving was a double lung transplant to a patient in need, says the Abel family.

In his final interview with The Auroran, which was published on November 15 following the October 22 Municipal Election in which Mr. Abel ran for mayor, he said he would always look back on his eight years as Councillor with a great deal of pride.

"I basically came in from volunteer coaching in the Little League and, by the end of it, I was involved in several aspects of the community, whether it is cultural, supporting organizations or supporting youth," he said, noting how much he valued the opportunity to serve on the Boards of the Aurora Seniors' Association, the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, the Aurora Cultural Centre, and more.

He said he was particularly proud of the push he made at the Council table that helped lead to securing the land for what is now Mavrinac Park (formally Thomas Coates Park), advocacy for a new home for Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School slated for Bayview Avenue at Borealis, the Town's purchase of the historic Aurora Armoury at the northeast corner of Town Park, and advocating for a new Cultural Services Agreement between the Town and the Aurora Cultural Centre.

Mr. Abel helped tackle the Cultural Services agreement in his earliest days on Council and said it was the issue that helped him "cut his teeth" and find his mettle as a politician.

"It made me realise I could stand up to people who oppose me and stand there for what I believed," he shared. "I was proud that I was able to do that with the Cultural Services Agreement, knowing now that the relationship is just fantastic. I am not saying it wasn't, because it was very good before with Mayor Morris setting it up, but we wanted to have a little more oversight and being

involved like the other organizations by bringing a budget forward and that sort of thing. I think that relationship was really improved.?

In looking back on the life and legacy of John Abel, former Aurora mayor Geoff Dawe paid tribute to this tenacity Mr. Abel had in standing up for what he believed, even if they didn't always see eye to eye on the issue at hand.

?It is a hell of a shock,? Mr. Dawe told The Auroran on Mr. Abel's passing. ?John was certainly very passionate about what he believed in and he was always very forceful about it. You never doubted his passion, for sure.?

Mr. Dawe said they had ?a lot of fun? together, particularly in their first term of Council when the then-Mayor, Deputy Mayor, and then-councillor Paul Pirri pooled their musical talents to form the tongue-in-cheek band they dubbed ?The Council Critters.?

Indeed, music was another passion for Mr. Abel, evidenced in his work on many cultural initiatives, including the foundation of Music Aurora, which has spearheaded the popular Aurora Winter Blues Festival and numerous initiatives to support up-and-coming youth musicians.

?I hope people will see John was indeed committed to his job and moving the Town forward,? said Mr. Dawe. ?We obviously didn't always agree, but I hope they will see him for what he was: a committed public official.?

This is a commitment he was prepared to extend into the new Council meeting. Although he contended that his political life was done at his final Council meeting last Tuesday and he was prepared to step back, he left on a positive note.

?I wish everyone here the best of luck,? he said in his final address, giving his best wishes to Council members who began the 2018-2022 term on Saturday. ?I know it is going to be a challenge and you deserve nothing but our support going forward, and I know you have it. I wish everyone the best and I thank everyone for giving me this opportunity.?

John Abel is survived by his wife Tracy, their daughter Devon, her husband Ian, and their son Eric.