

FRANKLY SPEAKING: Citizen of the Year?

Ron Wallace named Citizen of the Year? I disagree

By Frank Klees, MPP

Newmarket-Aurora

If the people who nominated Ron Wallace to receive Aurora's Citizen of the Year Award knew Ron Wallace the way I know Ron Wallace, they would have had second thoughts about this nomination.

Although I consider Ron a personal friend, and I risk offending the Mayor and those who came up with this well-intentioned nomination, I have to voice my opinion.

The 'Aurora Citizen of the Century' would have been a much more appropriate honour to bestow on my friend Ron Wallace.

You see, I know Ron and I know the person he is. I could easily have come to dislike this man whose first contact with me some 18 years ago resulted in a rather uncomplimentary column about my 'presumptuous' plan to seek the PC nomination for the 1995 election.

Who did I think I was, he asked in that article. A relatively new arrival to Aurora, never previously elected at any level of government and as 'Mister Aurora' put it at the time, 'he has to knock off a popular Charles Beer, the sitting Liberal member, who has had the riding for two terms'.

Then to finish me off, he headlined the article with a bold Frank Who?

Ron was there 18 years ago on June 8 when, late into the evening, the election results were confirmed. I was the newly-elected MPP and little did I know that Ron Wallace would appoint himself as my local Unofficial Opposition. And so it would be, that regardless of how many times I picked up the tab for our single malt interviews over the years, I could count on a searing opinion column or critical editorial that kept my feet to the fire and gave Ron the last word.

The Last Word

Ron wrote his last column in The Auroran on December 18, 2012. It carried the headline, 'The Last Word' and in it he wrote, 'Since this will be my final column, it's time to say good-bye. The disease they say I have has progressed to the stage where typing isn't fun anymore. And writing has never been my strong point.'

Well Ron, I disagree. And this time, we have the last word. Your writing was always your strong point, and we miss it. And the people of Aurora have recognized that your many other 'strong points' deserve to be honoured and remembered.

I was privileged to be in the Aurora Council Chamber when Mayor Geoff Dawe announced that the recipient of this year's Citizen of the Year Award was Ron Wallace. The response from those present was a predictable, heart-felt ovation for a man who over the years earned the title of Mister Aurora.

I know of no one who has served in so many capacities of public service. Whether in elected office as a school board trustee or Town Councillor, or in a leadership role with the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club, or as a volunteer firefighter, or watching over the Salvation Army Christmas kettle at the LCBO. Ron has consistently put his community first.

Ron's entrepreneurial spirit combined with his passion for literature and journalism, inspired the founding of R&R Books and eventually allowed him to fulfill his dream of owning his own newspaper.

It was in his capacity as owner, publisher and editor of The Auroran that Ron offered this bi-weekly column to me as yet one more way in which he could provide a public service. (And as I scramble to make the Sunday deadlines, I'm convinced this was also one more way for Ron to make my life miserable.)

Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal

As I watched Mayor Dawe bestow the Citizen of the Year Award, I recalled what an honour it was for me to nominate Ron for the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. I thought it would be fitting to close this column with words I used to introduce Ron at the presentation ceremony at Queen's Park.

'Ron Wallace, affectionately known as Mister Aurora is truly an exemplary citizen. Ron served as an Aurora Town Councillor, York Region District School Board Trustee, Aurora Chamber of Commerce Director, Volunteer Firefighter and in his literary life, enlightened his community through his several incarnations as a Reporter, Journalist, Editor and Publisher.

?To quote Ron, ?I'm in love with Aurora and all there is to it. I would do anything I could for the Town.?

Although I believe Citizen of the Century would have been a more appropriate designation for Ron Wallace, I join with the Mayor, Members of Council and the residents of Aurora in congratulating Ron on being honoured as the Aurora Citizen of the Year.

www.frankklees.com