

Hometown honour has special meaning for Jim Elder



By Jeff Doner

For decades, Aurora resident Jim Elder was an important part of Canada's national equestrian team, bringing home multiple honours and awards from various competitions from around the world.

For his many accomplishments, Elder was inducted into the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame on Wednesday.

"It's great being part of the first class, but it's greater having it done in your own hometown. It was my hometown for 50 years," Elder said. "I have to say that it is an extra special award because it is local. I did most of my competitive riding career in Aurora and hosted a lot of our functions there on our farm."

At 79, Elder has long since retired from his refrigeration business and competitive riding. However, he still rides recreationally and keeps busy with his grandchildren who all took a page out of his book by getting into competitive riding.

Having been on the equestrian team for 35 years, there are a few particular moments that stand out for Elder.

At the 1968 Olympics Games in Mexico City, Elder was part of a team that made history. Along with teammates Jim Day and Tom Gayford, the trio captured the gold medal in show jumping, marking the first Olympic equestrian gold medal in Canadian history.

It was also the only gold medal for Canada at those games.

Two years later, in 1970, the team proved that they were no fluke by winning gold at the World Championships in France and then in 1971 won another gold medal at the Pan American Games.

"I think our best competition was at the World Championships in 1970 in France," he recalled. "We're not a big equestrian nation with only so many horses and so many riders to show, so back in 1968 especially, when we won our first gold medal, they said it was first time luck, but then we won it right back."

"When we won it on their home ground [in France] that was a good moment and made us legit contenders on the international stage."

As important as those international wins were to his career, Elder remembers his first medal just as well.

"That was a bronze medal back in 1956 and that was in a three-day event," he explained. "The big part of that is that it's like a decathlon, we do dressage then a 21 mile cross country course with trails, jumps and then the last thing was stadium jumping. The

jumping was only four feet, so you didn't need a specialized horse.?

Things have changed since those days, but Elder still keeps tabs on Canada's riders, who he said many of which are local.

?I keep up with it and know them all. Most of the team riders have come from Aurora and the area and some still live in Aurora,? he said. ?I have a son and daughter that still live in Aurora, but there are a lot of them that lived or still live there. Eric Lamaze even lived just on the other side of the 400.?

Over the course of his career, Elder has competed in seven Olympic Games, five Pan American Games and three World Championships. He was inducted into Canada's Sports Hall of Fame in 1968 and was also honoured with the Order of Canada in 1983.

With so many years of accomplishments, Elder has kept many of his trophies and medals.

?There's one on display in the town office and the others are just lying around here,? he said with a chuckle. ?I don't have as much space for everything anymore, but I still have some good pictures and memorabilia kicking around.

?Let's put it this way, I've got good memories.?