

John Abel being remembered as a "man with passion"



By Brock Weir

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

Tributes continue to pour in for Mr. Abel, who died at Southlake Regional Health Centre on Thursday afternoon at the age of 64 surrounded by his wife Tracy, family and close friends; his final act of giving being a double lung transplant for a patient in need, his family confirms.

Mr. Abel had been hospitalized since December 2, just over 24 hours after his eight years as Aurora's Deputy Mayor came to an end.

"We are all devastated at the tragic news of former Deputy Mayor John Abel's passing," said Mayor Tom Mrakas in a statement issued Friday morning. "This is a very difficult time for everyone as we remember our time with John. John was loved by so many in our community.

"This community has lost a great man who has done so much for Aurora over the years. On behalf of Council and staff, we are all deeply saddened by John's passing and our prayers are with his wife Tracy and the whole Abel family at this difficult time."

Following his death, flags across Aurora were lowered as a mark of respect. A condolence book was made available for the community at Town Hall while Sunday night's Rogers Hometown Hockey broadcast paid on-air tribute to his contributions.

Visitations will be held at Thompson Funeral Home (530 Industrial Parkway South) on Thursday, December 13 and Friday, December 14, each day from 2 to 4 p.m., and 6 to 8 p.m. A celebration of life will take place Monday from 2 to 6 p.m. at the Royal Canadian Legion (105 Industrial Parkway North).

Mr. Abel was first elected to Council in 2010. Coming in first amongst the top eight highest vote-getters in the Council race, he succeeded Bob McRoberts as Aurora's Deputy Mayor.

He retained this post in the 2014 Council Election.

Following his bid for the Mayor's Seat this fall, he said in his final interview with The Auroran that he looked back on the last eight years 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 Mr. Abel, former mayor Geoff Dawe paid tribute to the tenacity his eight-year deputy had in standing up for what he believed, even if they didn't always see eye to eye on the issue at hand.

"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," he said.

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.

"John's tireless support, vision and involvement in the arts, culture and sports in the Town of Aurora have made our community a better place for all of us today and going forward," said Music Aurora in a statement. "His true passion for music and live performances helped instill a dynamic music scene at the grassroots level in Aurora, whether it be on the streets, in the parks, or any one of the many indoor venues. John was always involved either performing on stage or behind the scenes making it happen for the enjoyment and benefit of his community."

Mr. Dawe added he hoped people would remember Mr. Abel for his "commitment to his job and moving the Town forward."

This is a commitment Mr. Abel was prepared to extend into the new Council meeting.

"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.