

## West remembered as "straight shooter"



**By Brock Weir**

John West is being remembered this week as a straight shooter, a man who didn't mince words or suffer fools gladly.

They were the tools that helped him win multiple terms as Mayor of Aurora, as well as Councillor, in his decades of public service. The former mayor died Saturday after a long period of ill health.

Flags were lowered in Aurora Monday for the three-term mayor who served between 1986 and 1994, bookended by three further terms of Council.

Mayor Geoffrey Dawe paid tribute to Mr. West as 'larger than life', having first met when Mr. West served as a public school board trustee.

'He was a pretty straight shooter,' says Mayor Dawe. 'There was no need to try and figure out where John was coming from, of what he felt about a particular situation. He just laid it on the line. Love him or hate him, you didn't have to figure out what he was thinking.

'He did his homework and he got things done.'

This is a view shared by George Timpson, who served three terms as Aurora's mayor between 1975 and 1982. Mr. West was first elected to Council during this time and the two worked very closely together.

'When I look at his political life, I think he always had the interests of the people at heart and he did his best to represent all the people,' Mr. Timpson tells The Auroran. 'John was forward-thinking. I found him to be an honest guy and a straight-shooter. You always knew where John stood on an issue. He would be diplomatic, but he would be firm and had a sense of humour too. He knew what he wanted to accomplish and I think that is why he was never defeated from office.'

John West and George Timpson had a unique relationship in that West served as Deputy Mayor under Timpson and, after several terms, the roles were reversed after Mr. West challenged and eventually defeated Dick Illingworth as Mayor after a contentious relationship.

Stepping back and looking at John West's legacy, Mr. Timpson sees it both in his efforts to preserve Church Street School, and on

the Aurora street which now bears his name.

‘I remember some people at the time wondering why he wanted to build the Town office way out there a mile from the centre of town, thinking the centre of town was Yonge and Wellington, but look at Aurora today,’ says Mr. Timpson of John West Way. ‘That’s now the centre of Town. I think that was a fundamental thing that really brought Aurora together, although at the time people didn’t know [the potential of the area].’

For former mayor Tim Jones, Mr. West’s work helped Aurora cross the ‘invisible line’ east of Bayview Avenue.

‘John was passionate about the Town, but he was like a bull in a china shop in his style,’ says Mr. Jones, who counts Mr. West as one of his personal mentors. ‘Everything he did he thought as for the betterment of the Town and you can’t fault the guy for that. He took flack [for building Town Hall where it is] but you look back and I think that was the right move.

‘A legacy of that is breaking through the invisible line. There was this invisible line where no development occurred east of Bayview and I think through John that was the start of the breakthrough. He was really the guy who brought State Farm to Aurora under his watch. Negotiations with Magna started under his watch. To me, those are legacies anyone would be proud of. The legacy of bringing State Farm here is the start of growth in the final frontier of Aurora.’

When the two served as Councillors after being elected together in 1978, they occasionally disagreed and butted heads, but Mr. Jones felt he had been taken under wing. Certainly in the years of Mr. West’s mayoralty, he felt Mr. West was almost ‘grooming’ him to take over, which he did – succeeding as mayor for four consecutive terms.

‘When John had something he wanted to do, he took the bull by the horns and went forward,’ concludes Mr. Jones, noting they both had the benefit of largely the same staff team to bring things forward and get things done, a key to both of their successes. ‘He really did care about people. I think he had his own way of showing it, but he was passionate about Aurora. Politics is either in your blood, or it isn’t.

‘He had a passion for the Town, and he had a passion for people; albeit, it was with a rough personality, but if you understood that, you understood that he wanted to do good things.’

Along with Mayor Dawe, Mr. Timpson and Mr. Jones, surviving mayors of Aurora include Evelyn Buck and Phyllis Morris.