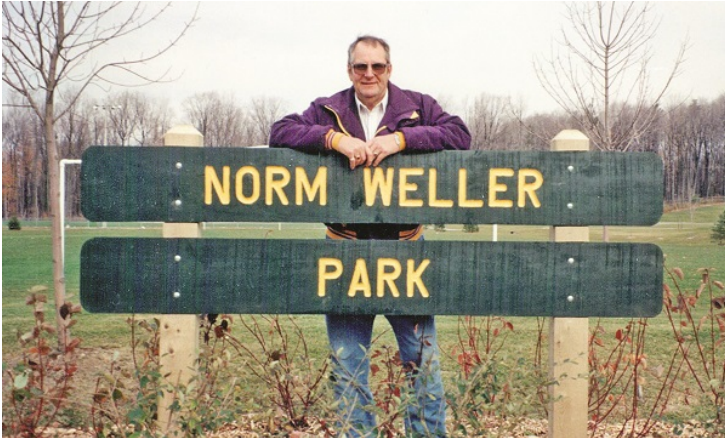


Norm Weller remembered as 'big man, who left big impression'



By Brock Weir

Norm Weller Park near Aurora's southwest corner might bear his name, but his impact can be seen just about wherever you are in Town.

Mr. Weller, Aurora's former Parks Director, and a former Councillor, died Saturday at Southlake Regional Health Centre at the age of 84, after a brief illness. In the days following his death, Mr. Weller is being remembered as a man with a clear passion for Aurora, a passion which led to the creation of Aurora's parks and trails system as we know it today.

'Initially we only had Town Park, and the subdivisions were built and parks were created, but they weren't really created - they were just areas designated for parks,' recalls former mayor Evelyn Buck. 'It was his idea the Town needed to hire someone to take care of the parks and over the next 12 to 14 years, Norm built all the parks in Aurora.'

Ms. Buck says she first met Norm Weller in a chance meeting when both were novice local politicians. They just happened to be standing in line next to each other to renew their drivers' licenses at Elwood Davis' gas station near Yonge and Wellington and they soon got to talking.

'It was like the Post Office when you went to pick up your mail - you soon got into a conversation,' she says. 'He was one of a kind in the energy and passion he has for everything. It didn't matter what you turned to, Norm had an opinion and Norm had a passion.'

Neither of them got elected during their first crack at municipal politics, but eventually voters invested their confidence in both of them and both continued their service to the community.

'My experience with Norm has been a great and successful working relationship, full of enthusiasm,' she says. 'He had a great relationship with everybody, including landowners and farmers. He was a tremendous help putting the Aurora Home Show together and working with farmers, if he hadn't been there, there wouldn't be a Santa Claus Parade because he got all of them to make their flatbeds and equipment available for the Parade. He just put his heart and soul into everything, well beyond any hours of work. There were no hours of work, as far as Norm was concerned. He just worked all the time and just loved the Town.'

This is a sentiment that is shared by former mayor Tim Jones.

'You could always count on Norm for telling it like he thought it was. Whatever he told you, you always knew it was coming from the heart. He didn't mince words and he said it as he saw it. Norm had his own style, not unlike John West. The two of them were kind of like bulls in a china shop sometimes, but it was in a good way. You knew their sentiment was definitely for the Town.'

“Ours are not just thrown-together parks. They are well thought out. He wasn't elaborate, but [everything he created] was basic and good. We have already benefited and people will tell you Aurora has some of the best parks going.”

Both former mayors agree an integral part of Mr. Weller's legacy is the hiring of Jim Tree, then aged just 19, who serves as Aurora's Parks Manager today. He spotted the young man's potential right out of high school and the latter “learned a hell of a lot from him.”

“He was a very principle-oriented man,” Mr. Tree recalls. “He worked with very little funds when he started, and that was the pre-development era when there were no development charges and funds were tough to get. He brought the department up from nothing and was very conscious of spending. He was always used to doing more with less and did everything with his heart and soul. He was as grassroots a person as you could ever imagine. He was always in touch with the people who paid the bills.

“That was the best advice he gave me – giving value to taxpayers' dollars. To do that, he was all about doing work in house and doing a lot of work and managing projects himself, getting deeply involved so he could track costs and minimize waste. That sticks with me to this day.”

Norm Weller is survived by his wife, Shirley, children Clayton, Lynn and Brenda and their spouses, grandchildren Rebecca, Rachel, Lydia, Stacey, Darren and Travis, and great-grandchildren Aaron, James, Natalie, Carter, Hudson and Teighan.