

?They will get to experience the joy and spirit of the community their grandfather helped shape?



John Abel's commitment and passion for community were recognized Monday afternoon with the dedication of a new park in his honour.

John Abel Park, located at 310 Hartwell Way, was formally dedicated by Mayor and Council on October 7, honouring the late Councillor who served as Aurora's Deputy Mayor for two terms, from 2010-2018, before passing away on December 6, 2018, just days after his time on Council ended.

The ceremony took place in the presence of his wife Tracy, his children Devin and Eric, John and Tracy's granddaughters, and several family members.

As she addressed the crowd, Tracy said she had a clear view of the future.

?His dedication to this community touched so many lives and it brings me great comfort in knowing his legacy lives on in this space,? she said. ?I look forward to seeing his grandchildren get the chance to play here, knowing that they will get to experience the joy and spirit of the community their grandfather helped shape.?

In her remarks, Tracy thanked Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo for bringing the park dedication idea to Council as well as local lawmakers for approving the idea and seeing it brought to fruition.

Features of the park were carefully chosen to dovetail with many of the passions Abel brought to his public work, including an outdoor amphitheatre in a nod to his love for live music and providing opportunities for artists, particularly youth, to find an audience; its location as a ?gateway? to the David Tomlinson Nature Reserve, reflecting his commitment to the environment; a community garden as a place to gather and work the land; and the future features of wood pole carvings and a healing garden, highlighting his work towards Truth & Reconciliation.

?It's always a great day when we open a new park in Aurora, but today is particularly special because we're also honouring a wonderful man at the same time,? said Mayor Tom Mrakas at Monday's ceremony. ?John was someone who cared so deeply about the community and about finding new ways to enrich the lives of residents and bring people together. That's precisely what John Abel Park will do for generations of Aurorans.

?I know this is something that would make John incredibly happy to see. I am very grateful that I had the opportunity to work with John on Council and saw firsthand his fierce love for Aurora. The truth is that we reserve naming parks and buildings after only those who made a significant impact on our community. I want you to know, Tracy, and all family and friends here today, that John made a profound and lasting impact on Aurora and we are so proud to be honouring him today by naming this beautiful community space after him.?

Following the Mayor's remarks, Tracy said John would be ?deeply humbled? by the honour and the efforts Council and municipal staff took ?in making us feel a part of the journey and for creating a space that reflects John's legacy.?

?Dad really did care about the Town and the community, so to have him honoured in this way is really surreal and very humbling,? agreed son Eric following the ceremony. ?During the planning process, it was always, ?Okay, this is a really nice idea and a lovely gesture to consider,' but we didn't know whether it would happen or not. The fact it has come all this way, the facilities and things they have dedicated and put into this park ? it's hard to feel it is deserved in the best sense of the world. It's a very big honour and I think he would be as speechless as I am right now.?

Daughter Devin added her dad would be particularly touched that his name lives on in a place where people can gather and share the ?joy in music, share their gifts in art, song or dance with each other, and share the joys of playing.?

?He wanted everyone to be together,? she said. ?He would have been calling on the community to have a bunch of young kids who hadn't had the opportunity to sing in front of the crowds, and other people who wanted to volunteer their time to come and have a nice concert ? that is probably what he would have wanted to organize here and have everyone enjoy.?

Following the ceremony, Tracy told The Auroran she hoped the park would serve to highlight her husband's legacy for generations to come ? not only to their descendants, but Aurorans present and future.

?To make a difference you have to get involved,? said Tracy when asked what she hopes her grandchildren take away from his legacy when they visit John Abel Park. ?Don't be an armchair critic. Stand up and fight for what you believe in. In the end, it will be recognized and rewarded. The reward you'll get out of volunteering and lifting people up when you can is huge.?

By Brock Weir