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Former NHL great Andy Bathgate, above, at the family-operated Bathgate Golf Centre in Mississauga.



Paul Briggs BATHGATE, Andy

NHL great Andy Bathgate remembered for more than just hockey career

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No one could have said it better than Bill Bathgate.

His father Andy Bathgate wasn't just a great hockey player, he was a great man who happened to play hockey.

Several others shared the same sentiment Tuesday during a memorial for the NHL great at the Andrews Community Funeral Centre in Brampton, the city where Andy and his family resided following his retirement.

He died on Feb. 26 at the age of 83.

Andy's family fondly remembered him, not only for his accomplishments through hockey, but also for the love and kindness he showed for those close to him.

Bill shared how his dad just wanted to live "the simple life" when his playing days were through.

That consisted of embracing his family and pouring his efforts into another passion of his: the family-operated Bathgate Golf Centre in Mississauga.

"He believed every job was one to be done and not delegated," Bill said. "I can't count how many times we'd be finished work covered in paint or grease and he'd say, 'Boy that was a great day.'"

Andy's daughter Sandee also shared how great her father was and how he displayed strong values.

She told the story about how he never drank or smoked, so, when she was a child, he told her if she could do the same until age 21, he'd give her \$1,000.

Sure enough, she kept her promise and Andy lived up to his word, giving her the money and a congratulatory note on her 21st birthday.

"I have long since spent the money, but I've kept that note and it means the world to me," she said.

When it came time to reflect on his hockey prowess, longtime friend Mike Pelyk, a former teammate of Andy's on the 1974-75 Vancouver Blazers of the World Hockey Association, was up to the task.

He couldn't get through his speech without explaining how much of a gentleman Andy was. He added how the Stanley Cup he won with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1964 was his crowning achievement.

Andy was best known for his time with the New York Rangers. With New York, he won the Hart Memorial Trophy in 1959, the same year he struck Jacques Plante with a slapshot to the face, prompting the Montreal Canadiens' great to become the first goalie to wear a face mask.

However, Pelyk believes Andy's true footprint on the game came after his retirement, when he and four other NHL alumni hired a lawyer and began the crusade to improve pensions for fellow retirees.

"It brought a lot of pride and smiles," Pelyk said. "You look at it and say, 'What's in it for Andy?' when really there was nothing in it for him ... He didn't really need the recognition."

There were hundreds in attendance at the memorial, among them hockey dignitaries like Paul Henderson, Johnny Bower, Walter Gretzky, Dick Duff and Eddie Shack.