

The Mississauga News — Friday Edition July 13, 1990

Peel Biog. Bk.

July 13, 90 MW

Brian Fleming ready for a deserved rest

Fleming, Brian

# Veteran educator bids job adieu

By STEVE PECAR  
Staff Reporter

For the first time since he can remember, Brian Fleming is taking it easy.

After a career full of night meetings, weekend work and plenty of top-level decisions during the day, he says he needs the rest — at least until he starts his new job.

For the past eight years, Fleming has served as the director of education for the Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board, one of the largest school systems in the country and one that has been growing at an unprecedented rate.

## Time to move on

In that time Fleming has overseen the implementation of dozens of programs and policies, hosted educational conferences, guided the opening of the Catholic Education Centre and generally had a lot of influence on education in this region.

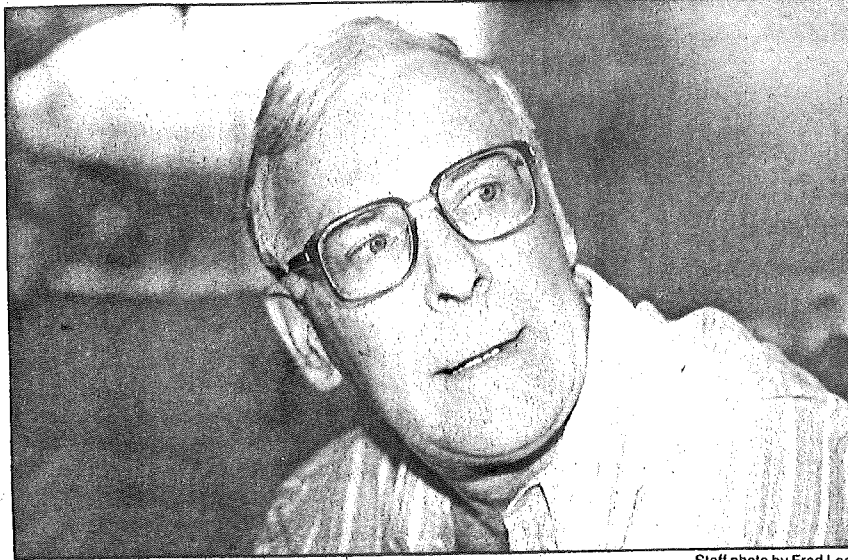
So why is a guy who is only 52 retiring from work where he has impact, respect and fulfillment?

"It was time," Fleming says simply. "Time for me personally to move on and time for the board to have new direction."

When Fleming speaks of time he relates to the the current stage of his life but in fact, time also means the amount of it he put in as an educator.

Born in Montreal, Fleming at a young age became involved in teaching, taking up a post as full-time instructor with the Montreal Catholic School Commission in 1956.

His career took him to the Baldwin-Cartier Catholic School Board in 1958 where he moved up



Staff photo by Fred Loek

**CAREER EDUCATOR** — Brian Fleming, who has served as director of education of the Dufferin-Peel Separate School Board for eight years, has recently retired from the post. But he says he'll continue working in the educational field for the Ministry of Education.

to principal in 1962 and served in that capacity for another five years.

By then, Fleming says, he and his family felt they would give small-town living a try and in 1967 packed up and moved to Stratford where he became a principal in the Catholic school system there.

"The small town was interesting but not what we were looking for," Fleming explains. "When the opportunity came to go to Peel, I took it."

Arriving in 1968, Fleming first took a job here as principal of St. Joseph's School in Streetsville, a post he fondly remembers because of the community and the

vast changes going on at the time.

"I came to St. Joe's just before the amalgamation of systems and the formation of the Dufferin-Peel Roman Catholic Separate School Board," he says. "There was a lot of work to do as a result but it was exciting because you could see the potential of this new big board."

## Massive upheavals

In 1972, Fleming became superintendent of schools for Dufferin-Peel, beginning a 10-year stint in a position that would be involved in the massive upheavals in the

Catholic education system yet to come.

Fleming says he took on the administrative chores of a superintendent at the time to broaden his scope of influence. He said at that stage in his career, he felt he would be better dealing with adults within the educational process than students.

At that time, one of the major issues for the board was expanding the system through to Grade 10. This was in the days prior to full government funding for Catholic schools when parents had to pay for the education of their children beyond the elementary grades.

"We saw the opportunity to expand and we were going to grab it," says Fleming who was largely responsible for the administration of this plan. "It was tough to get those high school grades going but we had to, we had to keep moving forward."

He says in those days separate school supporters had a tough struggle because they had to put out a lot of money to keep a system going that still didn't deliver adequate facilities. Fleming says the high schools that are converted elementary schools were cramped and ill-equipped, just as some are still today, but the community kept them going.

## Dream come true

"It's amazing to see what some of these people have had to put up with," he says. "The parents, students, teachers all deserve a lot of credit for making do with what we had."

Fleming also would like to feel those first pushes into Catholic high schools had an impact on the decision at Queen's Park to grant full education funding for separate systems in the province because it was done in then-premier William Davis' own back yard.

By the time the new legislation was in effect, Fleming had become the director of education for the board, so again it fell to him to organize a system for students from kindergarten to, eventually, Grade 13.

"Up to the point when the announcement was made, we had only dreamed of a complete school system," he says. "Personally, if you would have asked me back in the '70s, I honestly would have thought it could never happen. When it did happen I was

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## Fleming looks to the future

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very surprised — but naturally very pleased."

While issues like full funding grabbed headlines, Fleming says a lot of his real efforts for the board happened behind the scenes.

He says one of the projects he is most proud of was setting up a system to evaluate potential leaders for the board. He said this was necessary at the time because of the rapid growth and to make sure they had the right people to handle all the jobs.

Fleming feels this project was a success because many of the board's staff have been promoted to positions of greater responsibility within the system and at other boards.

More recently, Fleming has been working towards increasing the capital expenditures for the board so that more schools can be built to properly accommodate the almost 60,000 students in the system rather than have them in portables.

Looking back, the recently ex-director says his career at Dufferin-Peel allowed him to work with many people whose lives were dedicated to education and worked long, hard hours to keep the system running.

He says these people, such as the late Bob Hall the long-time chairman of the board, made the school system attractive to parents and students who were looking for the type of education a Catholic school system had to offer.

Himself, Fleming said he had a lot of opportunity to influence the direction of the board which is one of the reasons why he is leaving.

He feels it is time for the viewpoints of other leaders to take control and bring the board into the next century with a strong footing.

As well, he is also looking forward to the time of learning how to play golf and work around the house at nights and on the weekend.

"I really needed to slow down the pace," he says. "I often worked well into the nights and on the weekend there might be a conference. Now I can get to come home."

Although Fleming is retiring from the board, this month he will take on a new job with the provincial Ministry of Education in its legislation branch.

He says at age 52, he is young enough to start a new career and that he is healthy and eager to do so. The new job will also allow him to put his vast educational knowledge to good use put in the format of a 9 to 5, Monday to Friday routine.

Fleming says his job at the ministry will involve formulating and writing legislation and interpreting existing policies.

"I will still be dealing with people, handling inquiries and things of that nature, so that appeals to me," he says, "and I will be able to have an impact on education because there is the opportunity there for impact."

When asked if he will miss his colleagues, teachers and his hustle and bustle caused by thousands of students, Fleming's answer is again simple.

"I sure will."

And come September when a fresh school year is beginning and Fleming is no longer managing the fort, I'm sure the feeling will be mutual.