



Staff photo by Rob Beintema

Bob Harrison, seen here at Rattray Marsh displaying his Award of Distinction from Credit Valley Conservation in 1986, died recently of an inoperable brain tumor. The war veteran and architect was a pioneer in promoting environmental education.

Friend to the environment Harrison leaves his mark

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*Peel Bio.
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Bob Harrison was a friend to the environment long before it was fashionable.

Harrison, who died March 5 at age 74, was a pioneer when it came to preserving natural heritage and protecting the environment for future generations, his eulogist says.

"He was ahead of his time," former Mississauga Mayor Ron Searle says. "For many of us on council in the early days, the environment wasn't one of our primary considerations, but with Bob it always was."

Harrison served as Ward 2 councillor for the Township of Toronto from 1959 to 1966.

But it was as a member of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, off and on for 26 years, that Harrison really shone.

Harrison served on the conservation body as a municipal representative, a provincial appointee and a lay (citizen) member.

"He was really the impetus behind the establishment of the Silver Creek Information Centre," says Vicki Barron, general manager of Credit Valley whom Harrison helped to hire 18 years ago. The long-time chair of the information and education advisory board at the authority spearheaded the conversion of a barn at Silver Creek to become a student education centre. Some 9,500 students a year pass through the facility, now operated through the Dufferin-Peel Separate School Board.

"He had a total love and respect for the environment," Barron says. David Culham, a long-time authority colleague of Harrison's, said at his funeral that, "Bob shared a passion and commitment to the Credit River valley as a strategic patch of green in our midst."

After he won the conservation award of distinction in 1986, Harrison recalled his first experiences on the authority in 1959. In those days, the authority owned one piece of land (Terra Cotta) and didn't even have the right to ask owners not to build structures in the floodplain. "The protection of floodplains and waterways is one of the biggest strides we've made," Harrison said at the time.

Harrison was a long-time employee of the architectural firm of Donald Skinner in Port Credit. His architectural vision can be seen in a number of buildings around town, including the Mississauga Seniors' Centre, Burnhamthorpe Community Centre and the three "centennial" libraries in Lakeview, Lorne Park and Malton.

Searle says that although Harrison rarely spoke of it, he had a distinguished career as a pilot during the Second World War. He served in Burma and England. On one flight, his plane was hit by anti-aircraft fire, killing one of the crew. Despite being badly wounded, Harrison belly-landed his plane safely in England. He spent nine months in hospital, then declined discharge and went back to flying.

Harrison is survived by his wife Mercia, sister Lorna Price and brother Leonard.