

Paul Breg - Kennedy, Harold

One-of-a-kind, Harold Kennedy reflects on 27-year political career

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It used to irk Harold Kennedy when they called him a "pothole councillor."

The term was intended to be derogatory, to indicate that the councillor was good at addressing the little problems, but didn't worry much about the big picture.

Over the years, that intended slur has come to rest gently on the broad shoulders of the easy-going, soon-to-retire councillor of Ward 1.

"When I first heard it, I didn't like it," Kennedy said in an interview in the office he'll be leaving at the end of November. "If that's what it takes to serve the peo-

ple, I don't mind, although it is kind of a back-handed way to compliment a councillor."

Kennedy allows that he's now pretty proud of the pothole handle. "It has to do with something pretty important, which is keeping in touch with the people who put you there. That's what local council's all about."

Having survived a whopping 27 years in the world of municipal politics, Kennedy is an authority on what people want.

In verbal tributes to Kennedy when he recently announced his resignation, his fellow councillors stressed the 68-year-old's common decency, straight-

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Harold Kennedy at Lakefront Promenade Park.

Kennedy first ran at age 41

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forward manner and gentlemanly demeanor as the hallmarks of his nearly three decades of service.

A modest man, who admits his forte was never public speaking,

Kennedy has been able to survive into the media-mad world of 1990s politics by being a throwback to a bygone era when the personal touch meant everything.

When he was talked into running in 1967 at the age of 41, it was a different political world. Kennedy had to take two half-day's leave a month from his laboratory job at

the British American oil refinery (now Petro-Canada) to do the job. He was serving 7-8,000 people and could knock on every door in a campaign.

Now, there aren't enough hours in the week to do the job. And the constituents have changed too. "In the good old days, people accepted life the way it was, without com-

plaint" he says.

Kennedy was always used to hard work as part of a huge family of eight children his mother Evelyn raised single-handedly on the family farm at Eglinton Ave. and Tomken Rd.

Political service was bred into this family. His father was a councillor and trustee, his uncle T.L. Kennedy rose to briefly be Premier of Ontario and his brother Doug was an MPP for 17 years.

"The way I work with the people - being close to them - I guess that is heredity," he says. "My Dad and uncle weren't flashy people and they weren't particularly interested in climbing the political ladder."

Over the years, Kennedy has

been known for a number of special efforts. He was a charter member of the Mississauga Traffic Safety Council and started the local school patroller program.

He has been a tireless worker for the St. John's Ambulance and has been a long-time member of the Credit Valley Conservation Authority, which he now chairs.

In fact, the long-awaited completion of Lakefront Promenade Park, which took many years longer than Kennedy ever imagined, is one of the reasons he can step down now with contentment. He won't have to hold any more of those raucous annual meetings with upset residents. With typical attention to

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detail, the councillor notes proudly that he's just recently arranged a deal to have two local streets repaved, with the authority and City sharing the costs.

There are many highlights in his lengthy career, but Kennedy singles out a few. The most important political decision is easy: moving city hall from Cooksville to Hurontario and Burnhamthorpe. "I still think it was a good deal."

Then there's the Big Three agreements, which were the forerunner of the levy policy that has put Mississauga in such good financial shape today.

There's the eight-year struggle to get new water mains in the southern part of his ward to eliminate rusty water.

And then, of course, there's the replica of the Port Credit lighthouse at the Credit River which Kennedy got created as part of the reconstruction of a sewer pumping station.

It's a measure of the man that, despite his decision to spend more time with his large family, he still "feels guilty" about what is being left undone. He would especially like to see the redevelopment of the St. Lawrence starchworks through to fruition. But guess who has volunteered to be a block captain for the ratepayers' coalition bailing the current densities?

Kennedy is very proud of the fact that he never lost in 10 elections. But it's a measure of the man that he's even prouder of the fact that virtually every one of the people he defeated has become a friend.

With Kennedy's retirement, a string of 91 years of local political representation by his family (with one three-year exception) comes to an end. It will also bring to an end a kind of grass roots personal political style that may never be seen again.