

# Pair of newsroom legends head into retirement

By CHRIS CLAY  
Staff

Two award-winning journalists with *The Mississauga News* are putting a “30” — the mark traditionally used by those in the industry to indicate the end of a story — on their lengthy and distinguished careers.

After covering Mississauga extensively for more than 40 years, chief photographer Fred Loek and news editor John Stewart are ready to enjoy retirement. They, and their collective eight decades of knowledge, experience and expertise, left *The News* at the end of business on Tuesday.

Stewart, who lives in Erin Mills, had been a reporter with *The Mississauga Times* for a decade when it merged with *The News* in 1981. He spent 25 years as a City Hall reporter and joked he’s one of the few people who can remember Hazel McCallion before she was mayor of Mississauga, or even Streetsville.

Stewart has been the point man on several massive news stories over the years, recalling, for example, the sensational murder trial involving Peter Demeter (who was convicted in 1974 of arranging the murder of his wife).

However, one of his most memorable experiences as a journalist came

in 1979 during the Mississauga train derailment. Stewart was in London, Ontario visiting family and was watching Sunday NFL football when he saw coverage of the accident on the news and rushed back to Mississauga to cover the story.

He remembers waking the next morning and noticing on his drive to work just how empty the streets were. Most people had been evacuated due to concerns that spilled chemicals from the train could be harmful.

He knew something was really amiss when his neighbourhood Tim Hortons was closed.

But, despite the fact his safety was possibly at risk, Stewart went to work and started making phone calls and writing stories. He was alone in the office and even hid in the darkroom when police swung by, looking to evacuate everyone, so he wouldn’t have to leave the city and stop working.

“I never even thought of (my safety),” said Stewart, who won the prestigious Metroland Media Group President’s Award in 2011. “I was just so focused on what I was supposed to be doing.”

Loek, meanwhile, has mixed emotions about his retirement. While happy to put his feet up and relax a little, the longtime Clarkson resi-



The end of the year saw changes to *The Mississauga News* with the retirement of two veteran staffers, news editor John Stewart (left) and chief photographer Fred Loek. *Staff photo by Rob Beintema*

dent is sad to be leaving a job that brought him so much enjoyment.

“I used to always tell people that being a photographer is a great excuse for a job,” said Loek, who won the President’s Award in 2009.

“When I got the job, it was like a dream come true.”

Loek, who joined *The News* in 1971 and served as chief photographer for more than three decades, remembers the electric times cover-

ing the Demeter case and the derailment, among others.

He was thankful to the company for allowing him time off work to coach the Canadian women’s sculling team in the 1988 Olympics. He needed three months off that year to work with his team, which included Silken Laumann, and it was granted.

“I’ve always been very grateful for that and it was a huge deal because I don’t know in today’s culture a company would do that again,” said Loek, a member of the Don Rowing Club in Port Credit since 1968.

Dana Robbins, publisher of *The News*, has high praise for his two retiring employees.

“It would be difficult to overstate the contribution these two gentlemen have made to our newspaper,” said Robbins. “John’s even-handed, thoughtful commentary, combined with a near encyclopedic knowledge of the city, have provided a welcome refuge in a media landscape too often defined by hysterical, half-baked analysis.”

“Fred has been the eyes of our newspaper, and by extension, the eyes of our city. His images have, for an entire generation, captured those moments most important to us. Both John and Fred will be greatly missed, but they leave a great legacy for those coming behind them.”