

'Mayor of Malton' is 25 years young

NOT FOR CIRCULATION

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By JOHN STEWART
Staff Writer

When Frank McKechnie applied for a "part-time job" in Malton a quarter century ago, he had no intention of making it a career.

But this week he will celebrate his 25th consecutive year of elected office as a councillor for Malton — the second longest active service by any municipal politician in Ontario. Toronto alderman Fred Beavis has been in office one year longer than McKechnie.

Surviving a quarter century in elected politics is accomplishment enough, but McKechnie has done it in a community which has probably changed more in the last 25 years than any other in Mississauga.

TOOL MAKER

McKechnie first came to work and live in Malton in 1951 when he was a boarder. He was a toolmaker at the Douglas Aircraft plant on Airport Rd. He subsequently moved into

Toronto, but returned to Malton with his wife Annette in 1957 to take up permanent residence.

When he decided to run for office at age 27, Malton was a police village of 3,000 people, 1,500 in the old portion and 1,500 in the new.

The Malton representative on township of Toronto council was Tom Sills, who announced he was running for deputy reeve but changed his mind on nomination day and again ran in Malton. McKechnie won by 14 votes over Harold Langford, a third candidate who'd run as a "spoiler" to ensure Sills wouldn't be re-elected. Langford didn't ask for a recount. It was the closest result McKechnie ever had.

He served on that first council with Reeve Mary Fix, Deputy Reeve Robert Speck and Councillors Vic Vignale, Bob Harrison, Chic Murray and Roy McMillan.

McKechnie spent the first decade

of his career in hot water with his colleagues.

BETTER BREAK

His election platform, like that of his competitors, was that he would see Malton got a better break in getting money from the township. "The issue was that those guys in Cooksville weren't giving any money to Malton," recalls McKechnie. "That was the only issue."

The police village was still being run by three elected trustees who had their own ideas about what should happen. They often didn't jibe with what Township of Toronto councillors thought. And McKechnie was usually in the middle.

But there was never any question about where the Malton councillor's sympathies lay. It was always with the interest of his constituents. Over the years, McKechnie has earned a well-deserved reputation for this

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OVER

McKechnie

going strong

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tenacious pursuit of what he thinks is best for Malton.

In the early days, that meant confrontation with his fellow township of Toronto councillors. McKechnie was thrown out of council chambers three times by his colleagues and was even accused of giving confidential information to the Malton trustees.

When the village wanted to break away from Toronto Township, McKechnie had no hesitation in promoting its stand, just as his old political ally, Hazel McCallion, did later in Streetsville.

TRouble

Like McCallion, McKechnie was very aware that as long as he was in trouble with the other township councillors, he was winning support in his own constituency.

After that first tumultuous decade in office, the remainder of the years have seemed like "a piece of cake" in contrast, says McKechnie.

It seems he has spent his entire career dealing with the issue of the reconstruction of the four corners at Airport and Derry Rds. The battle first started in 1954 and the finishing touches on the intersection, complete with railway underpasses, is just now occurring.

Three years ago when McKechnie visited Malton, England, he discovered a fascinating parallel to his own experience. That village had just won a 46-year battle to get its main "four corners" intersection reconstructed.

While much has been made of the isolation of Malton from the rest of Mississauga, McKechnie says one of his main accomplishments has been "to bring Malton much closer to the City of Mississauga."

DIVERSITY

He's also proud of getting the four corners completed, getting the Malton Community Centre constructed, helping to plan the communities of Erin Mills and Meadowvale, and being part of the thrust to acquire waterfront lands along Lake Ontario.

Peel Region Chairman Frank Bean says McKechnie represents the community which is probably the hardest to ser-

vice politically in the entire region. There are seemingly constant labor problems and a wide diversity of ethnic and cultural groups.

McKechnie says the formation of the Malton Community Council has been invaluable in integrating the village.

"He's the father image of Malton," says Ward 6 city councillor David Culham.

McKechnie has also used the election process "to rejuvenate himself and his interests and knowledge of the community." At one time, the veteran councillor preferred an acclamation. Now McKechnie hopes for a challenge every election.

NO GROUPS

Culham says McKechnie has "always been concerned with policy, and not with power as such." So while McKechnie has been involved in some of the loudest, most vicious of council debates, he holds no grudges when the battle is over. To do so might mean jeopardizing a future vote which could win something for Malton.

McKechnie says that in a way, development has always been the issue in Malton. When he first represented the community, there were virtually no facilities — no shopping, no recreation, no industry, no churches.

Now, the community is almost completely developed and over the years, has scored a number of "firsts" in acquiring civic arenas, work yards, etc.

Back in 1967, McKechnie actually considered not running. His wife wanted him to retire. But then McKechnie saw a story in the local newspaper about a slate of candidates being fielded by the New Democratic Party and he had to run.

He's been running ever since, and shows no signs of stopping. He admits a heart attack in 1975, which put him out of action for three months, has slowed him down.

But McKechnie bristles at the suggestion that he will necessarily end his career as the local councillor for Malton.

"I'm still a young man," he says with a twinkle in his eye. "I'm only 52. I might still run for mayor."