

McKechnie held office for 39 years

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Ask Frank McKechnie how he was doing and you'd always get the same chipper answer: "First class, thank you."

Even in recent months after he suffered another heart attack, McKechnie couldn't help but answer greetings with his trademark cheery retort.

That was typical of the 67-year-old

who always seemed to have a ready smile and a handshake for everyone from VIPs to just ordinary folks.

The Ward 5 City councillor, who would have celebrated 39 years in public office Dec. 6, died early Friday morning at Toronto General Hospital.

No other municipal politician still in office in Ontario had served longer than the native of Glasgow, Scotland.

"There aren't enough pages in your newspaper to say what everybody feels," Ward 1 Councillor Carmen Corbasson said

later Friday morning as City Hall staffers tried to absorb the shocking news.

"What impressed me the most about Frank is that as much as he gave his life to politics and the community, he always put people first. A lot of politicians can't say that honestly," added Corbasson. "But that was our Frank: the support, the friendly smile, the helping hand."

Trademark smile

Ward 4 Councillor Frank Dale and McKechnie's long-time secretary Angela DiLegge visited McKechnie shortly before he died. Despite his weakness, McKechnie flashed his trademark big smile, Dale said.

"He was a real statesman on council," Dale said. "He was a devoted family man. He always had the community at heart."

He attributed the councillor's longevity in office to the fact that, "he always

treated every resident with the same respect. And he made sure the community's needs were met."

Mississauga South MPP and former City councillor Margaret Marland called it, "An enormous loss. He was so fair in his judgment and was always a very caring person."

McKechnie and Marland designed the City's coat of arms together, the one that is reproduced on the huge gold image that graces the City council chambers. Together they donated the registered design to Mississauga.

"We always said that if we never left anything else as a mark of being involved, that would always be a permanent remembrance," Marland said.

The former self-employed real estate and insurance man had been in and out of hospital since a heart attack at City Hall struck him April 22.

He had his first such attack in 1975, which was followed by bypass surgery that forced him to miss three months of work.

He had other health setbacks over the years, including a circulation problem in his leg in 1994 that also required surgery.

Despite urgings from many to retire, McKechnie would never consider the idea. He told *The News* shortly after being admitted to Credit Valley Hospital this spring that he had every intention of campaigning this fall and wasn't considering quitting unless doctors ordered him to do so.

The man who would become known as "the Mayor of Malton" first came to the police village to work and board in 1951 when he was a toolmaker at the A. V. Roe Company (later Douglas Aircraft) plant on Airport Rd.

Synonymous with Malton

He later moved to Toronto. But after he married his wife Annette, the couple moved back to Malton in 1957 where McKechnie's name would become synonymous with the small community in the far northeastern corner of the city.

When he first ran for office at age 27, Malton had 3,000 residents. He only ran because incumbent Tom Sills was moving up to deputy reeve. Sills changed his mind and in a tight three-way race, McKechnie won by 14 votes. It was by far the closest result he ever had.

Despite the changing face of the community, which became much more ethnically diverse over the years because of immigration, McKechnie was always able to forge comfortable electoral majorities.

In an interview when he celebrated his first 25 years on council, McKechnie recalled that his first decade on council was tumultuous as he fought an uphill battle for Malton's interests. "The issue was that those guys down in Cooksville weren't giving any money to Malton," he recalled. In many ways getting that fair share was the theme of McKechnie's whole time in office.

Among the proudest achievements of his political career were the reconstruction of Malton's four corners (which took almost a quarter century to complete), the construction of the Malton Community Centre and the provision of many new services.

Perhaps the greatest anomaly of McKechnie's career was his staunch support of a fourth runway at Pearson International Airport, even when most of his council colleagues vehemently opposed it.

He is survived by his wife Annette and his three children Colin, Fraser and Lynne. Visitation is Sunday from 2-4 and 7-9 p.m. at the Turner and Porter Funeral Home, Peel Chapel, 2180 Hurontario St. A funeral service will be held Monday at 3 p.m. in the Turner and Porter chapel with cremation to follow.

Donations can be made to the Heart and Stroke Foundation or to the Canadian Diabetes Association.