

Peel Brief McTAVISH, WILLSON

McTavish recognized for legendary effort to inspire LAC

What was the most important attribute of the ambitious group of local citizens who worked to establish the Living Arts Centre (LAC)?

"Patience" says Willson McTavish, the man who had more to do with making it happen than anyone else.

When he convened the first meeting of a half-dozen people to kick around the idea of creating a landmark building combining the visual arts and performing arts, he had no idea of the uphill struggle ahead.

McTavish, who'll turn 80 next month, spent five years convincing the community and council that the city deserved its own arts hall. Then he spent five more enduring a combative planning/funding gauntlet that eventually saw LAC's doors open two decades ago.

"If you have a good idea, it might not land until some time later," McTav-



JOHN STEWART
My Back Pages

ish said shortly after his induction into Mississauga's Legends Row Nov. 4. "You can't be over-pushing - you have to find a few people who like it."

One of those people was another inductee into 2017's Legends class, ex-mayor Hazel McCallion. She wasn't that keen until the McTavish zeal was invoked.

The former president of Mississauga Symphony may not have been "over-pushing" but he pushed hardest.

There were many key moments in putting the lustre on LAC: the meet-

ing where he saw McCallion "finally got it," the delegation to England securing \$3 million from Hammerson and the critical timing of infrastructure grants securing a third of the \$69 million price tag.

McTavish's claim to legendary status doesn't rest solely on those volunteer efforts, however.

In early November 1979, he was at a party at legal partner Bryan Coleman's house when a loud bang sent everyone into the backyard to watch a fireball light the horizon.

McTavish took on the "toughest job I ever had" as associate counsel for the subsequent inquiry into rail safety led by Mr. Justice Samuel Grange, with whom McTavish articulated.

At Upper Canada College near where he grew up and where his father was the doctor for 42 years, McTavish was too involved in theatre to try



Rob Beintema/Metroland

The 2017 Induction Celebration for Legends Row, Mississauga's Walk of Fame, was held at Erin Mills Town Centre Saturday. Recipient Willson McTavish.

out for the football team. He was water boy on the team coached by Roy McMurry, who supervised the derailment recovery for Ontario.

McTavish's devastat-

ing cross-examination of one federal official left the bureaucrat in tears.

The founding chair of the Mississauga Arts Council truly found his calling as Ontario's Offi-

cial Guardian, now called the Children's Lawyer, from 1984-2002.

He ran what was essentially the nation's largest law firm, protecting children's rights during acrimonious divorce and custody battles.

You might expect elevation to Legends Row might provide special status in his household.

Not so. McTavish's partner Laurie Pallett, executive director of MAC for its first 17 years, claims prior rights. She was inducted in 2014.

When the pair extol the virtues of LAC - its acoustics, sprung floors, teaching studios, restaurant, community feel and general "uniqueness" the passion that powered its creation takes centre stage again.

"It's wonderful to be recognized," says McTavish, "However, It's really for all the people who helped us get the arts in Mississauga off the floor."

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