

# Green movement pays tribute to campaigner

The bur oak is one tough little tree. It has thick bark which allows it to survive forest fires. It can take the drought because its root system runs very deep.

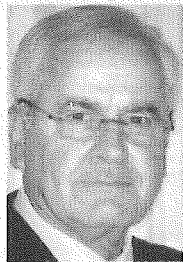
And it's native to this area.

It also has a prickly side — the acorns it produces have an unusual feature, the bristle fringe that runs around the outer edge of their deep cups.

So, it was perfectly appropriate to plant such a tree Sunday on the banks of the fast-flowing Credit River in memory of Peter Orphanos, the founding father of Mississauga's modern-day environmental movement.

Peter's friends in the green movement, his family and a large collection of the politicians he so relentlessly lobbied while he was alive gathered late Sunday morning outside the Vic Johnston Community Centre around a bur oak that was planted in his honour.

His widow Iris and Mayor Hazel McCallion — with whom Orphanos had a long, complicated and prickly relationship — unveiled a plaque that recognized Peter for his astounding dedication to the cause that he pursued with unmitigated zeal for so many years.



**Peter Orphanos**

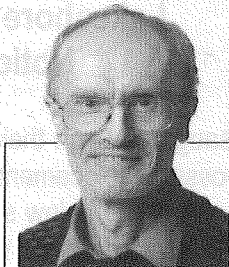
It was a mark of the man that Ontario's veteran Minister of the Environment Jim Bradley came in person to say a few words. Marolyn Morrison, the mayor of Caledon, drove down to pay her respects and half of Mississauga's council was there — a near quorum, as someone joked.

The people who spoke had a lot in common — Peter had badgered them all continuously over the years over various issues and berated them publicly and privately for their lack of vision and action. And he had laid out proposals about how things could be improved, he had founded the Peel Sierra Club to make it happen, he had put his fundraising money skills where his mouth was and he put many hours of "sweat equity" planting trees.

Peter Orphanos was truly an engaged citizen who made the improvement of the environment his mantra. And if he had to irritate a few people along the way, so be it.

"The nicest way I can say it is that he was pleasantly persistent," Ward 11 Councillor George Carlson said in his tribute. "No matter how much land we bought, it wasn't enough. If we bought 200 acres, then we'd need 2,000 more, according to Peter."

Public School in Erindale Woodlands for many years, Peter was known as "Mr. O" to succeeding generations of students, many of whom



**John Stewart**  
News Editor

he inspired to appreciate the natural world.

He was known as Mr. T — for Trouble — to those who ran Reid Milling, which would later become the Kraft Mill.

Orphanos, who lived across the valley from the mill, was obsessed with trying to move it out of the valley and he moved heaven and earth to try to make that ethereal goal a reality.

Ward 6 Councillor Ron Starr said Orphanos confused him with David Rockefeller when he was first elected.

"This is what he said to me," Starr said, leaning forward into the microphone, cupping his hand and whispering: "I want you to buy the Kraft Mill."

Orphanos also took Starr on a trespass tour of the Kraft valley property — something he did on principle, on purpose, with many politicians and reporters.

"At times I avoided his calls," said Starr. "But he was a visionary and his heart was always in the right place."

Indeed it was.

Peter's wife, Iris, admits that her husband was labelled "a troublemaker" by many, especially in his early years of environmental fundamentalism. It was a label he carried proudly because it meant he was getting somewhere with people of influence.

But Peter mellowed as he grew older, founding the local Sierra Club, serving on provincial public drinking water committees, sitting on Mississauga's Environmental Advisory Committee and learning how to make those political compromises that actually got things done.

But he never stopped being a powerhouse for change. And he was unapologetic about the fact that he would use every means at his disposal — including wearing down politicians in long series of private meetings — to get his way.

If he were reading this, Orphanos would call up to complain unless it included a concluding pitch for his cause — especially on Earth Day.

So here it is. You may never have met Peter Orphanos, but if you value the Credit River that sustains our wildlife, our water system and our souls every day, please give generously to the Peter Orphanos Credit Forever Tree-Planting Fund. You can donate at [www.creditvalleyca.ca/peterorphanos](http://www.creditvalleyca.ca/peterorphanos).