

Very Interesting Person

Old-fashioned neighborliness adds warmth to city hall

By JOHN STEWART

Staff Writer

If public relations starts at the front door, then John Pekeski is the best PR person this city has ever seen.

You probably don't know the name. But if you've ever been to city hall during a weeknight evening, then you've met John.

He's the relaxed, breezy, pipe-smoking gentleman who greets you just inside the main doors with a hearty welcome and an offer of help. His job description says he's a security guard but one might more appropriately call him Mississauga's goodwill ambassador.

"This job is my ideal," says Pekeski, "because you're meeting the people."

He works from 4:30 to 11 p.m. five nights a week.

People come in with their hydro and tax bills.

"And you're smiling and payin' your taxes," says Pekeski with a smile as they arrive.

OLD-FASHIONED

He calls it "throwing them a punchline." It's the kind of plain old-fashioned neighborliness that people complain no longer exists in this society.

"I just talk to people nice and plain," says Pekeski. "You got to be nice."

John brings fruit and vegetables from home to the employees in public relations. He starts the mayor's car on cold winter nights to warm it up before she leaves. He gives her sound advice to take it easy every once in a while.

"She's as strong as any man," says Pekeski. "She's got to be brave, she's in a man's world."

This was a real farm community when Pekeski moved into the first house ever built on Glengarry Rd. He and his wife raised five children there.

The road got its name when the first owners put five names in a hat and drew one out. Pekeski's brother was in the Dundas-Glengarry regiment. That's how Glengarry Rd. got its name. Pekeski says it was better known as "Rockcliffe Blvd." in those days because of its rough character.

OVER THE COUNTER

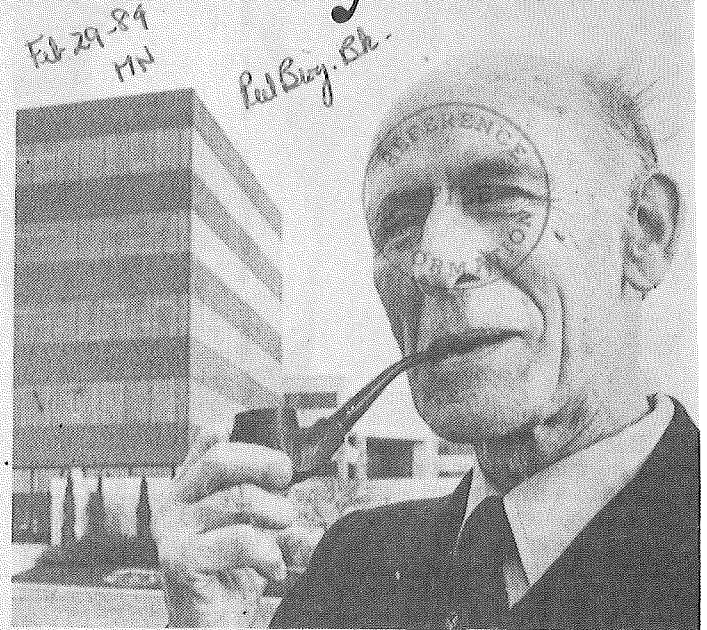
Pekeski was in the meat business for 40 years with Loblaws. Working over the counter "was my idea of being a butcher," he says. That's where his natural ability to visit shone.

A slip while carrying a hind of beef caused Pekeski back trouble for years. He went to orthopedic surgeons, was on Valium for two years, and tried acupuncture.

In 1972, after 40 years with the company, Loblaws retired him at age 57 with a pension of \$31.25 a month. He had to start over. His first security job paid \$1.80 an hour.

After working for three companies and serving in Kanefff apartment buildings, the Univac building, the McLaughlin building and the Northern Telecom building, he applied at city hall at the suggestion of a friend five years ago.

He was delighted when he



Security guard John Pekeski has been a fixture at Mississauga City Hall for the past five years. His philosophy on meeting the public is "you've got to be nice."

(Staff photo by Rob Beintema)

got the job.

"We're so favored to have him," says Ward 6 councillor David Culham. "He just gives such a special feeling of people caring," says Culham. "He's a very dedicated citizen."

"He's absolutely fabulous," chimes in Councillor Larry Taylor. "He's always prepared to do a little bit extra. I've even had John call me at home "to try to help somebody who arrives at city hall needing help."

TOO FANCY

Pekeski is 69 years old and doesn't know whether he'll make the move with the rest of the municipal staff to the new city hall. "It might be too fancy over there," he says. "There

will be a different standard of security. It will be computerized and they'll have surveillance and it will be underground," he says. Pekeski definitely isn't looking forward to working underground garages at his age.

If the City wants to put people at ease in its new headquarters, however, it won't allow Pekeski to retire just yet.

What better link to their existing home could they have than John Pekeski's warm greeting, "Hello there. How are ya' doing?" as you walk in the front door of the new city hall?