

POOLEY, Russ L.
**Russ Pooley: public
servant, community
champion**

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His official title was community development co-ordinator, northeast district, recreation division, Mississauga community services department.

It might have more accurately been "community champion" or "troubleshooter supreme" or "Mr Fix-It."

Russ Pooley is officially retiring Dec. 31 after 41 years with the city making sure that things got done.

Pooley has received numerous awards, but nothing spoke more eloquently of his legacy than the large crowd of citizens - the ones who build and maintain our collective social infrastructure - at his retirement dinner.

You can't look far in this municipality without seeing his impact, especially in Malton.

Former Mississauga Citizen of The Year Helene Burrows recalled how she was terrified of the "severe, professional" bureaucrat she met when they collaborated to revive the Malton Community Festival in 2004. "Then I found out you were a real tender-hearted pussycat," she said of the man who's now a close friend.

Pooley helped launch the original Malton Festival in 1976 with the original mayor of Malton, Frank McKechnie.

"He was always thinking of new ideas, referring volunteers, sharing stories



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from other organizations and making opportunities known," says Carole Berry who helped found that festival.

Pooley's legendary attention to detail is second only to his ability to help fractious groups form consensus.

From Fritterfest, the first city-wide festival in 1976, to the Rainbow Festival, to the Square One Older Adult Centre, to his formative efforts to foster a public garden at Riverwood, Pooley has been the navigator who kept community groups on target.

His "above and beyond" work won the Heritage Champion Award two years ago. "He always tried in every way to help make events and programs the biggest success," says Heritage Mississauga's Jayme Gaspar.

"He is a treasure."

His greatest triumph is probably Carassauga, which was struggling in 1990 when the city provided a \$50,000 revitalization grant and sent him in for a

year of executive resuscitation. It was self-sufficient by 1995.

"His eye for detail, his love for people - he's a very smart man who sees the big picture and is a problem solver," says Carassauga Executive Director Linda Siutra. "He's the kind of bureaucrat we should have more of, the kind who see what needs to be done, go and do it, then say sorry afterward."

As former mayor Hazel McCallion says, "Russ was with us all the way and when we ran into problems he solved them. He had a way of getting people together."

Pooley pioneered community development in the 80s, recruiting many of the staff who remain its backbone.

"All of the successes that somehow may be attributed to me today are actually accomplishments led by you and other community leaders like you who are not here," Pooley said in his farewell speech.

But many achieved success precisely because he knew city hall, connected them with the right people and gave them key advice.

There is one job undone on Pooley's watch, the elusive Malton youth centre that has never materialized.

When it becomes reality, there's no question whose name should go on the sign.