

Former Brampton mayor Ken Whillans remembered on 25th anniversary of drowning

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Mayor Kenneth (Ken) G. Whillans

Twenty-five years ago, residents of Brampton were shocked to learn of the tragic death of the city's popular mayor, Kenneth (Ken) G. Whillans.

Whillans drowned on Aug. 24, 1990, at Prince Edwards Island's Cousins Beach while on vacation with his family. He was 63.

"Today we remember him more than anything," said Whillans' son, Ward 2 and 6 Councillor Doug Whillans. "He had a lot of love for Brampton and its heritage. He became very popular because he was real people's person... there are still a lot of memories."

Doug said there is hardly a day when people don't comment to him about his dad. He said people loved him because he was a great supporter of multiculturalism and loved to be among people.

"He was very big on the Peel Memorial (hospital) and did a lot of volunteering for the hospital," said Doug.

Whillans was elected mayor in 1982 following the death of Mayor James E. Archdekin, who died of a heart attack while in office.

Following Archdekin's sad demise, Whillans won the office in a two-man mayor's race against Terry Miller. He had been in office for eight years when he did.

"The city was shocked when he passed away," said longtime Brampton real estate developer and artist John Cutruzzola, who had worked with Whillans on the development of core downtown area. "He was a good mayor, a man with a passion. He worked hard to maintain certain economic balance at the City Hall. We also worked together on my proposal to build City Hall in downtown Brampton."

Cutruzzola said Whillans was pivotal in the development of downtown Brampton as a "city of opportunity" open to all businesses.

The city has named Ken Whillans Square, located in front of city hall at 2 Wellington St W., and a street, Ken Whillans Drive, after him. There is also Whillans Lake, near Caledon, and Whillans Gate, a 122-unit development near Queen and Kennedy streets.

The Credit Valley Conservation also named a wetland area stretching from Terra Cotta to Palgrave from the Caledon Trailway to the Credit River on the eastern boundary of Inglewood village in the Town of Caledon as the Ken Whillans Management Area, in his honour.

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