

Tireless volunteer Fiona Cowles passes away

By Mark Pavilons

One of King Township's leading volunteer forces ??Fiona Cowles ? has passed away.

Cowles lost her courageous battle with cancer last week.

Cowles had been involved in the K



ing community for decades and earlier this year received her just rewards ??the Citizen of the Year award.

?Fiona was a gift to King. She worked for the municipality in so many ways,? said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. ?She was a former employee, a dedicated volunteer and an advocate for her community. I am delighted that we were able to celebrate her contributions to King last spring when she was awarded King Township's Citizen of the Year. Personally, she was a dear friend and we will miss her greatly.?

Fiona's tireless efforts reverberate through such organizations as Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT), Oak Ridges Trail Association (ORTA), Heritage King, King Township Historical Society and the Special Olympics.

She was a resident since 1973, and Cowles spent nine years working for King Township's parks and recreation department. She also ran for Ward 5 councillor in the 1997 municipal election.

Cowles was a hiking enthusiast and her volunteer efforts began shortly after she arrived here, helping to create the Oak Ridges Trail Association. She served as president from 1995-1997. Today, the trail, which stretches from Caledon through the Northumberland Forest, is a 275-kilometre swath of pristine pathways, and the portion running through King is by far the most attractive.

With CCKT, she played a role in helping to keep King green with a thoughtful approach to planning.

Cowles joined the King Township Historical Society in 1974, thus beginning her ongoing volunteer activities.

She was involved with the King City Badminton Club, King Township Library Board, King City Seniors' Centre, Laskay Community Hall board, Pottageville Tennis Club, King's Environmental Advisory Committee.

?A supportive family, a general interest in the community I live in, and enjoyment of the outdoors, have been an excellent foundation for a happy and fulfilling life, whether paid or volunteer,? she said during her acceptance speech earlier this year.

Fiona's passing came as a shock to those on the CCKT?board, according to chair Greg Locke.

During her ordeal, she was present and active at nearly all of their meetings, contributing her thoughts and strategies as always.

?Fiona was an active participant on just about every issue CCKT champions,? Locke observed. ?She started debate and discussion on issues, and tackled problems with letters and presentations to match.?

Fiona was secretary of CCKT from the 1980s well into the 1990s. Through CCKT, Fiona helped to review various planning applications and plans including the King City Community Plan and the King Township Official Plan. She always brought a thoughtful and reasoned approach to each application and issue. Priorities for Fiona included protection of valuable heritage resources and natural corridors and features, along with a strong appreciation for creative and attractive architectural design.

?We remember Fiona as always active and on the go, an explorer and adventurer; always respectful and gracious; dedicated and loyal; resilient and perseverant; a wonderful example to others; a lifelong learner who enjoyed a wide range of interests; generous with her time and talents; and a remarkable volunteer in the community and beyond who loved to discuss topics of interest and to collaborate with others on projects.?

?She was indeed the heart and soul of the township and it has been a privilege to be her friend,? said long-time friend Jane Underhill, who was part of the group who nominated Fiona for the Citizen of the Year award.

Long-time friend and colleague Elaine Robertson, said Fiona served the community on so many levels, that this is a great loss for King. Robertson served with Cowles on the heritage committee and Fiona set a very high standard for everyone. Her focus was always giving back to the community. Robertson last worked with Cowles on an ASK bus tour of local pioneer churches. Cowles,

she said, was also interested in adaptive reuse of heritage buildings.

Robertson said Cowles crammed in as much as she could during her last year and worked right until the very end, always putting family, friends and the community first.

Cowles participated in the unveiling of the ORTA sign at All Saints Church, just a few weeks ago.

According to a statement from ORTA, they will miss her ?dedication to rural, green environments, her love of the Moraine and its trail, her commitment to volunteerism and her warm, friendly personality.?