

Former mayor Margaret Britnell made many contributions

By Mark Pavilons

Flags at the King Township municipal office and facilities few at half-staff in honour of former mayor Margaret Britnell, who passed away Oct. 12.

The long-serving politician contributed more than two decades of public service to the Township of King between 1970 and 1997.

"Margaret will be fondly remembered as a woman of great character and leadership," said Mayor Steve Pellegrini. "On behalf of the Township and our council, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences during this time of sorrow. Our thoughts and prayers are with Margaret's family."

Margaret Britnell's service to King spanned over 27 years including:

Mayor from 1973-1980 and 1988-1994; councillor in 1970, 1985-1988 and 1994-1997.

King Township Council will observe a moment of silence at the next council meeting.

"Margaret was an active member of her community and York Regional Council," said York Region and Chairman and CEO Bill Fisch. "She was someone so committed to making our community a better place, and will be missed."

Britnell served as a member of York Regional Council for 14 years between 1973 and 1994.

Margaret Britnell's parents emigrated from Yorkshire, England in 1922 to settle in western Canada to farm.

She was born in 1927 on the farm in Kaleida, Manitoba and was the oldest of four children, Margaret, Doris, Gwen and James.

In 1937 her mother died and her father found it very difficult to manage four young children on his own along with the farm.

In 1938 the children were sent to live with various relatives in Tewkesbury, England. On their journey to Great Britain, Margaret was given a dress to wear by the Salvation Army as they had no clothes to speak of. She often talked of the respect she had for the Salvation Army. One because of the kindness they showed her when she was so young, and the other because their management are not a significant cost of the charity.

While living and schooling in England she worked in a bake shop and as an administrator at the U.S. army base in Tewkesbury.

In 1946 Margaret returned to Canada on the SS Aquitania, lived briefly on the farm in Kaleida, but soon settled in Winnipeg Manitoba.

While working at the Vulcan Iron and Engineering Company in Winnipeg she met Stanley Britnell and was married in 1950. While still living in Winnipeg they had two children, Gwen and James.

In 1959 they moved to Toronto. At this time they purchased a property in King Township, built a home and moved into it early in 1962.

Shortly after moving to King a third child, Timothy, was born. While raising her children Margaret became involved with parent-teacher associations (president, Kettleby School) and King Hills Ratepayers Association (president).

In 1969 she was elected to King council and was very active in the promotion of the Official Plan for King Township.

In 1971 she was a founding member of the Concerned Citizens of King Township and as a result a coalition of concerned citizens from 17 municipalities from Nanticoke to Pickering was formed. The group was formed to oppose the 500KV Ontario Hydro transmission line proposal through these municipalities. This resulted in the formation of the Soldandt Commission and later the Ontario Energy Board.

In June of 1971 Margaret's husband Stanley suddenly died at the age of 46.

Along with her distinguished political career, Britnell served on numerous committees within King and at York Region.

She was also a member of the Children's Aid Society, a trustee of York County Hospital, regional representative to the Metropolitan Toronto and Regional Conservation Authority. She was also on the Oak Ridges Moraine Committee.

She developed an illness in the mid 2000s, managed her health, spent time with her daughter, two sons, four grandchildren and many friends until her death.

An open house in her honour will be held Saturday, Nov. 1 from noon to 6 p.m. at the King City Seniors Centre, 30 Fisher St. In lieu of flowers please send donations to The Salvation Army, National Processing Centre, P.O. Box 8200, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3C 4W5, or select "Donate" at www.salvationarmy.ca. Or you can bring your donation to memorial and the family will be sure to submit it to the Salvation Army.