

Lambton Agricultural Hall of Fame Application For Leonard McNeil

Contribution to Agricultural Community (Within Lambton County)

One of Leonard's greatest contributions related to his involvement with the International Plowing Match held in Lambton County in 1991. He worked tirelessly to champion Lambton's bid to secure the match five years in advance of the event. He acted as Chairman to lead a large group of local volunteers and encouraged their commitment and cooperation which resulted in a highly successful event. When the match generated significant profit, Leonard advocated that rather than splitting the funds between local volunteers and charities that the funds should be invested and the interest shared with active and involved young people in the form of annual post-secondary scholarships. Thanks to Leonard's vision, to date 99 post-secondary students have shared in a total of over \$150,000 and the principal amount of the original investment has not been touched!

Leonard was also a very active supporter of the Lambton Plowman's Association and acted on its executive for several years. He was noted for his competitive plowing skills and to this day there is a special award in his name at the annual Lambton Ploughing Match that is highly sought after by young people early in their competitive plowing careers.

Leonard was an active and engaged beef and crop farmer, involved as a member of Lambton Cattlemen's Association and Lambton Soil and Crop Improvement Association. He valued woodlot conservation and became involved in landowner projects with St. Clair Conservation Authority.

Leonard also provided a valuable service to the agricultural community by utilizing his auctioneering skills at many farm auctions over a period of years. His jovial approach and keen sense of item values ensured that his auctioneering services were in high demand.

Contribution to Agricultural Community (Outside Lambton County)

Leonard's involvement in plowing match activities spread his influence beyond Lambton's borders. He competed in neighbouring Counties' plowing matches as well as International Plowing Matches in various locations across Ontario.

His auctioneering activities were utilized by farmers outside of Lambton County as well, thus spreading Leonard's influence to neighbouring Counties in Southwestern Ontario.

Leonard developed a great rapport and strong relationships with the Amish and Mennonite communities in Western Ontario. He acted as a liaison between these communities in the

traditional agricultural communities when either was in need of a variety of agricultural products such as livestock, penning, farm equipment, furniture, etc.

Personal Development

When we think of Leonard many descriptors come to mind

Witty and Humorous: Leonard's sharp wit and mannerisms endeared Leonard to many different groups in various situations. His wit and humour allowed him to diffuse conflict in political situations and within volunteer groups.

Talented Speaker: Whether addressing a large group in a political situation or leaning over the back of a pickup truck, Leonard was always able to speak fluently and appropriately with a touch of entertainment value in his words.

Genuine and Compatible: Leonard's ability to listen and show concern for others was rewarded with their respect. Even though he moved in many circles, criticism of Leonard by others was very rare.

Strong Negotiator: At the meeting between local Lambton Plowmen and the provincial Plowmen's Association executive to negotiate the percentage split of any potential IPM profits, Leonard represented the local interests. At the end of the night, I am sure some provincial executive members wondered, "How did we agree to that deal!"

Proud of his Heritage: Leonard would proudly wear his kilt and speak of his Scottish ancestry whenever the opportunity arose. Leonard also played a key role in having the pioneer church in his area donated, moved and reconstructed at the Lambton County Museum in Grand Bend.

Musical: His musical ability manifested in two particular ways. His large stature and style with the bass drum added great flair to the Petrolia Highland Pipe Band. In his early adult years, he utilized his training as a singer to perform at over 90 weddings and funerals at the request of many couples and families.

Vision and Consideration of Others: Because of the success of the IPM in 1991, over \$100,000 profit remained for the discretionary use of the local committee. Precedents had been set in the IPM's in the years just prior to 1991 where a good portion of the profit had been allocated to the volunteers based on the number of meetings they had attended prior to and during the match, with some residual money donated to local charities. Leonard, as the individual with the most meetings attended and the most potential financial return to gain, set the example insisting that he had become involved in the IPM as a true volunteer and felt the money should go to another worthy cause. His vision of rewarding deserving youth and creating a legacy for the IPM 91 resulted in the very successful IPM '91 post-secondary scholarship program that continues to present awards every one of the last 26 years without touching the principle of the original investment.

Home Business Development

Even though Leonard was involved in many activities beyond the farm, farming still remained close to his heart. With support from his father and additional purchases on his own, Leonard grew the farm to 500 acres to pass on to his next generation.

Leonard was proud of his beef herd as part of a cow-calf operation selling yearlings. He utilized pasture and crop rotation in the cropping operations that were integrated with his beef operation. Additional acreages of corn, soybeans and wheat were sold as cash crops.

Contribution to Community beyond Agriculture

Public service was Leonard's greatest contribution beyond agriculture. Between 1992 and 1998 he completed two three-year terms as a Councillor in Brooke Township. From 1998 until 2000 Leonard was Mayor of Brooke Township. In 1999 Leonard served as Warden of the County of Lambton. He was very active in the initiative to amalgamate the Township of Brooke and the Village of Alvinston and helped set an example for 14 other municipalities in Lambton County that were considering amalgamations during that same time period. From 2000 to his passing in May of 2002, Leonard served as the first Mayor of the newly created Municipality of Brooke-Alvinston.

Leonard was very active in the Masons Lodge as a member of the local Lodge at Napier. He was chosen Master of the Lodge in 1977 and became District Deputy in 1985. Leonard traveled extensively visiting Lodges in the area and developed strong relationships with fellow Lodge members.

Leonard's contribution as the bass drum player added value and excitement to the Petrolia Highland Pipe Band in parades and concerts throughout the area.

Length of Service to Agriculture Community

Leonard was born in 1950 and was actively engaged in service to his family and the agricultural community at an early age, right through to the time of his passing in May of 2002. Unlike many of his peers who looked to employment in the petrochemical industry in Sarnia, after Grade 12 Leonard's goal was to return to the farm and contribute to his agricultural community.

Summary

Leonard McNeil was a generous, honourable and modest man. He made an exemplary contribution to the agricultural community in Lambton County and if selected, would be a worthy member of the Lambton Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Lambton Agriculture Hall of Fame Selection Committee

Dear Members,

I am writing in support of the nomination of Leonard McNeil for the Lambton Hall of Fame. I knew Leonard well and was involved with him in many ways and organizations from the time he was a teenager and plowed at the Lambton County Plowing Match, until his untimely passing.

He was a well-known individual who had a great love for his community and a desire to try and make it better. I have said many times that Leonard had a heart as big as himself and I will attempt to give you some examples to back up what I say.

When he was Chairman of the 1991 International Plowing Match which was held in Lambton, it turned out to be a very successful event which realized a substantial profit. Leonard promoted a scholarship fund which still exists today instead of paying the other volunteers by which he would have had the most to gain. Everyone was truly a volunteer. Another time when Leonard and I were both members of County Council, Ken Dick who was the Manager of the Social Services Division at the time approached me with a proposal to have a draw for half a beef with the proceeds going to Habitat for Humanity. The only two beef producers on County Council at the time, Leonard and myself, and so I mentioned the proposal to him and we divided the cost of the beef.

Another happening, which involved County Council was when the Lambton Heritage Museum was looking for an antique church which had not been altered or modernized. There was a Presbyterian church in the northeast corner of Euphemia on Cameron Road which met the criteria and was about to close. Margaret McNeil, who was Leonard's wife, had attended it as a girl and her father and mother were still board members. There was interest, so a meeting was held on site. It included County staff, church members, Leonard and I. Everyone thought it was just what the Museum was looking for and the church members were in favour. Now, there was a one big issue, which was moving it the long distance to Grand Bend. I said to Leonard, moving this building is going to cost a lot of money and his answer was "Don't worry about that. I know a guy who owes me one, and he is a mover". So it happened at very little cost and now sits at the Museum. Leonard also gained notoriety as an auctioneer, his stature and booming voice could attract and hold the crowd's attention. If bidding slowed, he would stop and tell one of his many stories to liven up the crowd. I also think his honesty and that of his father contributed to their success.

Leonard was elected Warden of Lambton County in 1999 and did an excellent job representing the County. He was also very proud of his Scottish heritage and has a full set of regalia which he dressed in on special occasions. In 1999, there was a special event held in the old Florence Hall, which had a very high stage. After the program, a lady approached me and said you should never let Leonard sit on a high stage when he is wearing a kilt!

He was also a member of the Masonic Lodge and held various offices at both local and district levels.

You can see by the events mentioned above that I have had many pleasant and notable experiences that involved Leonard. We became good friends and I always found him to be straightforward and honest. Nothing would please me more than to have him inducted into the Lambton County Agricultural Hall of Fame.

Yours truly,
Bill Bilton

March 20, 2018

My memory of Leonard McNeil

By: Penny Phillips, Past Mayor, Township of Brooke

There are many people you meet during a lifetime. There are times when you meet someone who really has left a void in the community once they have gone, Leonard McNeil is one of those individuals.

Leonard had the gift of story- telling, but even though he enjoyed a good joke, he did have a serious side. Rural community and country living was something Leonard truly loved. He enjoyed touring the old country back roads, checking on the bridges, how the crops were growing, making sure culverts were clear in the drainage ditches to take water away.

Agriculture was first and foremost a passion for Leonard. As a council member, he took pride in the farming community and residents of Brooke. Leonard was truly an ambassador to the farming way of life. He always strived to get the facts, before making a decision, he wasn't afraid to ask others their thoughts before making up his own mind. He was a great listener, which made in my opinion, a great communicator.

Leonard enjoyed a good home made meal, which may explain the importance of food production! He never drank alcohol, but he truly enjoyed desserts, especially pie! Pie was his favorite! He could easily eat a whole pie himself.

Leonard had many interests, talking on the phone was primary. He spoke to many folks on either a daily, weekly basis to share information and discuss current events. I recall him often calling my home to discuss topics that he had researched from his various contacts. I can't even imagine what Leonard would have been like with all the new social media and phone technologies today, as he was rather amazing with the old "land line" telephone.

It is rather difficult writing down all the great memories I had working with Leonard. He was without a doubt, a good council member, a good team member, a good leader, as well. The community was a better place with his involvement there is no doubt of that.

Once, Leonard said to me that while it made him happy to be a farmer, a neighbor, a friend to many, a husband, his greatest joy was to become a father. He was a big fella, who lived life to the fullest!

Re: Leonard McNeil Induction

Leonard was a larger than life presence in the area and I was fortunate to live next to him for many years, it was always an adventure. He was a loving husband, father and son, a good neighbour a great friend. a formidable presence in the community with the ability to lead, provide advice and answers relating to various situations.

He was integral in the community serving on municipal and county councils, numerous farming organizations and service groups. He possessed the ability to get to the heart of the matter and provide sound innovative advice and solutions with good judgment, humour and arbitrary skills. Leonard was always available to offer advice and input, no problem too big or too small. He was interested in agriculture and rural life, involved in various agricultural groups and organizations, he enjoyed all aspects of farming from soil and crops, drainage, conservation and animal husbandry, he was a talented and entertaining farm auctioneer with an open mind, a willingness to learn new and innovative methods and ideas while retaining the history of farming for future generations, he was able to see the value of the past and the need to progress to the future.

He possessed an inquisitive nature, willing to learn new ways of accomplishing tasks and figuring out inventive solutions to correct defects and ease workloads. He was always available to family, friends and community when required, he had a great sense of humour and was extremely loyal to what he believed in.

He was a big man with a big heart and he left a big hole in this world. I was proud to call him my friend.

Shirley McEachern
Neighbour and Friend