

Harold Murphy: The 'heart and soul' of Calabogie Peaks

50-year career in law just one facet of his busy life

BY MELANIE KARALIS, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN DECEMBER 31, 2011



Harold Murphy was the driving force behind the development of Calabogie Peaks. It is now a resort that is open four seasons, and is an important economic driver in the area.

Photograph by: handout photo, Image supplied

It was a long-distance passion, but that didn't stop Harold Murphy.

Nearly every weekend during the ski season, Harold would make the 4 1/2-hour drive from Toronto, where he practised law, to Calabogie as he set about transforming a small, financially troubled ski hill into the fourseason resort it is today.

"He had his heart and soul in this place," says Harold's 56-yearold son, Paul, who took over as president of Calabogie Peaks in 2009. Harold Murphy died Nov. 30 at age 83.

Though he was born in Toronto, the Murphy family ties to Calabogie run deep. Harold's father owned a cottage on Calabogie Lake. Harold assumed ownership in 1974 and it became the family's home away from home.

"He loved it up here and Harold's children, I'm one of five, we all loved it up here so it became our cottage even though it was a 4 1/2-hour drive," Paul explained with a laugh. Harold and Mary Agnes' children are Joanne, Paul, Harold, Mary Christine and Michael.

"There probably wasn't anybody commuting from Toronto to Calabogie in those days. It was a real anomaly," Paul said.

Harold and his wife Mary Agnes lived in Toronto, where he was a senior partner at the Garvey Ferris law firm and practised business and commercial law for 50 years.

His legal career was just one aspect of his multi-faceted life. A constant for the Murphy family was the connection with Calabogie and the family is as much a part of Calabogie Peaks as the skiers that line the hills every winter.

Harold remained as a director for the rest of his life but Paul reflects fondly that everyone on the hill still called him "The Chief," as Harold was the driving force of Calabogie Peaks' transformation.

The Murphy cottage still sits on Calabogie Lake and has been a family treasure for four generations now. "We still have this beautiful cottage on the lake. It's an old rambling down place but it's one of the old historic cottages on the lake, built in the 1900s and the family still has the cottage today," Paul said.

Calabogie Peaks started small - with two T-bar lifts. The business was struggling and Harold helped financially to keep the ski mountain alive. But as the operation continued to struggle, Harold decided to take on the ski mountain himself.

Paul remembers receiving a phone call from his father in 1982 at his home in New York. Harold announced that he was buying Calabogie Peaks and becoming owner. "Everybody said to him, 'Why are you doing this?' and he said 'Well, this place needs to stay open.' It was then and remains today a really important economic driver of Calabogie."

Under Harold's leadership, the ski hill was transformed. Ancient equipment was replaced, a golf course and waterfront property was acquired and condominiums and a hotel were built, creating the four-seasons Calabogie Peaks Resort of today.

His contribution was not just to the ski hill - it was to the entire Calabogie community itself. Peter Emon, the mayor of Greater Madawaska Township, which includes Calabogie, knew Harold for years.

"The public side of Harold, he was a lawyer and a shrewd businessman. He had an excellent command of the English language and when he was arguing a point he could, sometimes, be quite devastating and that was often off-putting with folks. But the private side of him, you know, he was quite generous and quite supportive of people and the community."

Emon says Harold's quiet generosity helped the community in many ways including offering legal advice to residents and the township and assisting residents in need at Christmas.

Harold helped acquire waterfront land for the township, providing a municipal boat launch and community land that is used today for weddings and recreation.

Harold is survived by four of his children, Paul, Harold, Mary Christine and Michael and grandchildren Michael, Sean, Annabelle and Evelyn.

© Copyright (c) The Ottawa Citizen