

Brent Coney



Brent Coney was a Waterloo man who spent his short life showing everyone around him what it meant to be a gentleman. While he was labelled “developmentally challenged,” the grocery store clerk knew the inner workings of the human heart better than even the most sophisticated of whom he called friends.

His father Ted Coney said once, “To him, nobody ever does anything wrong. Everybody is a nice person. He’s never had a bad word to say about anybody in his life.”

After Coney died of cancer in 2000, a mother with two young children stood at the flag flying at half mast in Coney’s honour to tell them about his life:

If they grow up with “even half of the integrity, commitment, dedication, purpose and positive attitude that their friend Brent . . . had towards life and people, then I will be a most pleased and proud mom,” said Laurie Lessard.

Coney, who died at 48-years-old, religiously attended City of Waterloo council meetings for thirty years. A graduate of the former Laurel Vocational School, Coney was awarded a City of Waterloo watch in recognition of his attendance. His dedication to local politics was matched only by his gentle nature. A downtown business owner once said of Coney, “He’s honest, he’s pure and he doesn’t tell a lie. He is what you see.”

Coney had a remarkable memory for dates and numbers, frequently typing out “newsletters” for councillors. Each note passed to councillors was signed, “Brent A. Coney Born Dec. 9th 1951.” Coney was passionate about local politics but he also traveled to Ottawa to keep tabs on federal politicians.

When asked why he attended all the meetings Coney said simply, “I like to see what’s going on and who to vote for and who not to vote for.” His father Ted said, “He loves Waterloo, loves council and thinks Waterloo is the greatest place in the world.”

After Coney was diagnosed with cancer, his friend Kitchener-Waterloo MP Andrew Telegdi arranged a lunch between Coney and then Prime Minister Jean Chretien. While Coney was too ill to make the Ottawa trip, his political friends decided to make him Mayor for a Day.

On a June day before he died, Coney toured a construction site, rode in a fire truck, operated a fork lift, dined on roast beef and was photographed sitting in the mayor’s chair with the entire city council behind him.

Coney was a grocery store clerk at the Central Meat Market where he made the day of many customers with his winning smile and incredible ability to remember their

birthdates and those of their children and grandchildren. It was here that Coney received the nickname, "Brent the Gent."

When he wasn't working or attending council meetings, Coney could be seen visiting local businesses, restaurants, the fire hall and downtown library. He was also a member of the St. John's Lutheran Church. He lived with his father on Margaret Street in Waterloo. His mother, Wilma, died in 1986.

Hundreds of people packed St. John's Lutheran Church for his funeral and people spent two hours in line to say good-bye at the funeral home. During his illness and after his death, Coney's family received hundreds of cards.

Photo courtesy of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record Collection, University of Waterloo Library