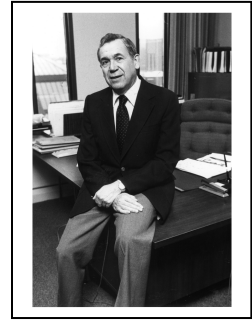


Don Schaefer



When most people think *tax collector* it's not with affection. Indeed, when Don Schaefer took the post in the early 1950s he often arrived on doorsteps with a police escort.

Collecting the unpopular \$10 poll tax on every male between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-five was one of his earliest tasks. "I hated it," he said once. "We raised about \$2,000 to \$3,000 a year."

It's a testament to Schaefer's character and integrity that when he retired as the City of Waterloo's finance commissioner in 1984, accolades came pouring in: "I've never known anyone held in such deep affection by staff, politicians and the taxpayers," said one councillor.

"Around city hall, he's been kind of Mr. Waterloo, Mr. City Hall," said a staff member. "He's done it all in his career and he's had a finger in just about everything that has happened." He was also affectionately known as "The Godfather" at times and when he retired, council presented Schaefer with a ceramic figure of a sailor resolutely holding the wheel of a ship. The figurine was called "The Helmsman."

Schaefer started working for the city in 1947 after serving in the Canadian Army for three years. He could have pursued a job in the hardware store his father managed, but the young Schaefer had always been interested in municipal politics.

Schaefer was born at home on John Street in 1924 and his love for his hometown blossomed as he grew. He shared this passion with his sons when, each Sunday after church, he took the family on a tour of every new housing development and business venture in the city.

He was appointed tax collector in 1951 and by 1955 he was the City of Waterloo's treasurer. In 1973 he became its first commissioner of finance. When he retired at the age of sixty in 1984 he had served Waterloo for thirty-seven years.

During his watch, the town became a city; assessment rose from \$8.5 million to \$173 million, and the population grew from 10,000 to 60,000. While he watched services grow under his leadership, he also saw physical changes like the construction of the Conestoga Parkway. When he retired, Schaefer didn't want to take credit for any particular project but he did express pride in the way the prosperous Waterloo Town Square had evolved.

He was regarded as a modest and frugal man whose devotion to the City remained constant despite offers to work outside municipal government. By the time he retired he had attended some 2,000 council meetings and the city debt was \$65 per capita, one of

the lowest in Ontario at the time. “I felt there was always a challenge with the growth of Waterloo,” he said upon retiring. “We’ve grown so rapidly things were never dull.”

Don Schaefer served on many provincial committees during his long career, including the Association of Municipal Tax Collectors of Ontario and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario. Locally, he gave his time to several organizations including the Waterloo Lions and Rotary Clubs and the Waterloo Public Library. In 1984 he received the Ontario Bicentennial Medal. He was honoured locally when Schaefer Street, off Weber Street North, was named after him. He passed away after a brief illness in 2003.

“I don’t think there has ever been an individual anywhere in this country who has served a community as well,” said Marjorie Carroll, mayor at the time of Schaefer’s retirement. “He is going to be greatly missed. He’s kept our city in a financial place envied by most.”

Photo courtesy of Doug Schaefer