

Lynne Woolstencroft



Lynne Woolstencroft had been in Waterloo mere months before being elected as a public school trustee in 1970. She was inspired to run for office after speaking to a Jewish boy who had been ostracized in a local school because of his religion.

“I was enraged,” she said. “. . . so I decided to do something about it.”

That election would be the foundation of Woolstencroft’s life in public service. It was the beginning of a career in local politics that would span more than thirty years. Her crowning achievement was being elected mayor of Waterloo in 2000; sweeping the polls that year and winning sixty-five percent of the popular vote.

The landslide victory caused her husband Peter Woolstencroft, a University of Waterloo professor of political science to remark: “It comes down to R and R, recognition and respect. Lynne’s roots go deep in the community. She has a core of people who have voted for her for three decades.”

However, Woolstencroft’s years of service would be overshadowed within months of her taking office when details of the bungled financing deal for RIM Park became public.

Woolstencroft had been on council when the deal was struck with MFP Financial Services Ltd. Six months into her term as mayor it was revealed that the deal would cost taxpayers more than twice what was originally thought.

Woolstencroft fought valiantly to repair the damage, but when she ran for mayor again in 2003 she was soundly defeated. Many believed she was ousted because of the RIM Park financing fiasco. “Talk about arriving in the mayor’s office at the wrong time,” commented a local professor. “I know in politics timing is everything, but this is text book.”

Woolstencroft was born in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and followed her passion for the arts by teaching piano and becoming a high school English teacher in Edmonton before moving to Waterloo with her husband. She has a diverse background which includes writing children’s books and a stint as a backup singer for folk artist Joni Mitchell.

Her involvement in politics began literally at the grassroots with her cleaning up neighbourhood creeks in rubber boots. During her early years on City council she pushed for environmental initiatives at a time when the environment was not a popular issue. When she took a brief hiatus from politics in 1991 she reflected on her achievements: “One of the things I’m proudest of is . . . my campaign on recycling issues really pushed this council and put environmentalism on the agenda.” She noted the work she did on behalf of school libraries and enhancing services to the needy. “They might not seem like a lot to others but those are the things I’m proudest of.”

Woolstencroft served on the Waterloo County Board of Education from 1974 until 1981, leading the board as chairperson from 1978 to 1981. She ran as a Progressive Conservative candidate in the 1985 provincial election and was defeated, but later that

year was elected to City council where she served until 1991. Woolstencroft was always a popular candidate, garnering the most votes of anyone on council in several elections.

In the 1995 federal election she ran as the Progressive Conservative candidate for the Waterloo riding and lost. Lynne Woolstencroft once acknowledged that politics can be a very rewarding career but can also be deeply disappointing. “There is the exhilaration and the uncertainty and the torment and the wondering if you’re going to be able to do the things you want to do.”

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