

## LARRY BABCOCK REPRESENTED TRADITIONAL VALUES THAT ENHANCED OUR COMMUNITY AS A WHOLE



"Any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee" ( John Donne)

It would be a difficult task to imagine too many other local citizens whose death conjures up the essence of the above quote as well as the life and recent unfortunate death of Larry Babcock

He was without doubt a gifted man in countless ways. Friends have described him as possibly the best natural athlete to come out of Chatham and an outstanding lawyer who was more of a friend than legal advisor. He was all these things and more.

His athletic accomplishments alone place him in the "local legend" category and his recent induction into the

Chatham Sports Hall of Fame underscores those accomplishments. However, it was not his athletic nor his legal skills that impressed me the most.

Larry Babcock was from "the old school" of responsibility, involvement and genuine concern for his community. After graduating from the University of Michigan he could have, very easily, never come home to Chatham again.

No one would have thought ill of him if he had forsaken his boyhood home for the likes of a big American city or if he had taken his law degree and fled to Toronto in pursuit of a exciting and promising law career in a big firm specializing in high profile clients.

His old home town would have understood. In fact many would have cheered him on and some would have even taken great delight in following his career somewhere else and, like many others did with his hockey accomplishments, taken great delight in enhancing their own lives by living vicariously through him.

But.....that was not his style. After university he came home and with his good friend Al Hinnegan set up a law practice in a modest, far-from-glamorous office on Victoria Avenue.

One might have forgiven him for being preoccupied with his legal responsibilities and sports and ignoring other aspects of life in the community but he did not.

I was always amazed at the places I would see him and the many arts, culture and heritage interests that he and his equally accomplished wife "Dot" possessed. Together they made a wonderful team that knew what was going on in ALL aspects of their community and

supported as many things as they could.

Our paths crossed a number of times over the years. He was a neighbour who lived down the street and his interests often intersected with mine.

He was a strong supporter of the Chatham Public Library and when they sponsored an activity like a reading and discussion regarding CBC's Canada Reads Contest, I was surprised to see him there showing his support and expressing his interest in and concern for the literary side of life in Chatham.

His interests spanned arts, culture, music, drama, education (he served on the Kent Board of Education), world events and even local history. On more than one occasion he would comment on something that I had written in this column and would provide a relevant insightful review on what I had written. His always perceptive comments demonstrated to me not only a keen interest in local arts, culture and history but an unspoken but obvious support for anyone else in the community trying to make Chatham a better place to live.

When I had a new book published, he would not only know about it but be one of the first in line to buy a half dozen or so books to give to his friends at Christmas time.

Once upon a time there were many men like Larry Babcock in Chatham. They knew their community inside out and made special efforts to be part of the community. They knew that it was their responsibility to support all those things in a community that made it a better place to live.

In the early 1900s, Chatham was alive with businessmen, politicians, lawyers, doctors, teachers and other educated as well as like-minded citizens from all walks of life who worked together to create a cultured, multi-faceted, richly textured society. It was a form of "noblesse oblige" in the best sense of that word.

They knew that, which Larry Babcock also clearly understood. They knew that they had been given gifts of power, prestige, wealth, intellect, artistic talents, athletic ability and a honoured position in the community in which they lived. They also clearly understood that with these gifts came great responsibility.

They knew, as Larry Babcock did, that it was their duty to be involved in as many aspects of their community as possible. They, like Larry Babcock, felt an over developed sense of responsibility to not only their families but to their community as a whole. They knew that if they did not get involved, show interest, invest their time, money and expertise that their community would never grow, and that it would never truly be cultured and progressive.

Larry knew these things. He lived a life that few, unfortunately, choose to live in this modern age. He was involved. He cared for things beyond himself and his immediate concerns. He saw the big picture. He saw his role in the development of that big picture and never allowed himself to be pigeon holed into smaller pursuits.

We desperately need more people like Larry Babcock in this day and age. We need people who will unselfishly give of themselves, to work each day to make this place a better place to

live. Too many of us give up, narrow our pursuits or get discouraged and give up before we even give it a good try.

Larry Babcock was a man full of vision, passion, care, concern, and love. A love that embraced, nurtured and gave tremendous support to his immediate family but also to the community as a whole which he obviously saw as a meaningful extension of his own extremely talented family.

Some will remember him as a great athlete, others as a top notch lawyer, others still we remember him as the perfect husband and father but I, in my brief acquaintance with him, will forever see him as the archetypal citizen who was always ready to offer a sympathetic smile, a helping hand, a kind word and a man who had a passion for his community and all that it was, and all that it could be.

Some men see things as they are and simply say "Why"? Men like Larry Babcock see things that never were and choose to say "Why not?"

We should all strive to be, in our own way and using our own unique talents and gifts to be more like Larry Babcock. He was a shining example for us all. He represented the best that exists within us all and demonstrated, on a daily basis, what we could all be if we strove hard enough, had enough passion, developed enough eclectic interests and chose to truly care about the place in which we live.

Larry Babcock was, as Shakespeare so eloquently put it "a man, take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again".