

Councillor Request Inquiry

42-2018

2018

Dear Members of Council,

In response to the Information Request made at the September 11, 2018 Council meeting regarding retaining a copy of the Warren Thomas eulogy as an historical record of the County, I am pleased to advise that the County has received the consent of the family and Mr. McGhan to include the eulogy in our records.

We are expecting a copy of the eulogy shortly. Once received, we will add the document to the our Council record for September 11, 2018 on the public website.

Warren Thomas

May 8th, 1936 / August 30th, 2018

Thank you Lorne, Cameron, Glenda, Mary Lynn and Marilyn for giving me the privilege and honour of saying a few words of remembrance for Warren.

The distance from the small rural hospital in Lamont Alberta to the Riverview Lodge in Fort Saskatchewan is only 20 miles. But during his more than 82 years from May 8th, 1936 to August 30, 2018 Warren traveled 10's of thousands of miles and did amazing things along the way and he certainly made this world a much better place.

When I say he was a Husband, Father, Grandfather, Great Grandfather, Political leader, Church leader, Grain farmer, Fish farmer, Rancher, Exotic animal breeder, Piloted his own plane, was an Auto Body mechanic, Farm Machinery salesman, Factory worker, played hockey and played in the School Band, was an inventor of numerous very useful items and some just for fun inventions too - it would cause one to gasp. But even more amazing than the many things that Warren did is that he did them all exceptionally well and with class, pride, enthusiasm and humility all the while keeping his eye on the real prize - HIS FAMILY.

During the almost 50 years that Warren and I have been friends we have spent hours, days and weeks together and there was never a time when he did not inject into all discussion a conversation about his three kids Lorne, Cameron and Glenda and his daughter in laws, Mary-Lynn and Marilyn and eventually his 6 grandchildren and 3 great grand children and the special family member Cody. I can not imagine a parent who was more proud of his family, their accomplishments and their progress through life.

Warren was the second youngest of 6, he started school at Good Hope but when their farm home burnt down the family left the farm and moved to the city. Unfortunately his father passed away when he was very young. Warren carried on attending the Norwood School, playing hockey and in the Edmonton School Boys Band and there he met the love of his life Dorothy. They started their more than 60 years of faithful marriage.

Warren and Dorothy moved back to the farm southeast of Josephburg in 1957 with baby Lorne who was born a year earlier. Cameron arrived in 1958 and Glenda (aka - Pebbles) in 1963.

Initially the farm was pretty typical with cows, sheep, geese and chickens. One of the more interesting stories about early Thomas farm life involved a very young Cameron who was constantly harassed by the farm animals (ram, geese) but especially the barn yard rooster. One day as Cameron was crossing the yard the rooster spotted him and gave chase - Warren as all good farmers do, kept a loaded rifle handy in the back porch. As the rooster was gaining ground on Cameron, who was running for his life - Warren shot the rooster in full stride just feet behind Cameron. Lorne says that the whole family was so happy - which I assumed was because Cameron had survived the Rooster attack but Lorne said OH NO! - we had rooster for dinner that night!

In the early 70's Gordon Moyer, this facilities name sake, who had been Councillor for almost ever and was considering retirement - concluded that Warren would be an outstanding leader and peoples representative so encouraged him to become a member of the Recreation Board to wet his feet and political appetite. Then in 1974 Warren was elected to his first of 5 - 3 year terms on County Council and as a Public School Trustee. Warren was also Reeve for 5 years from 1981 to 1986.

I can attest to the fact that during those 15 years, Warren's leadership, courage, dogged determination and his fierce yet

compassionate approach to business and governance brought notoriety to Strathcona County and the Josephburg area. Plaques on the walls of several major recreation centres in Fultonvale, Ardrossan, Sherwood Park, Josephburg, the first County Hall, a new Sherwood Park Fire Hall all bear his name as Councillor or as Reeve. The Shell Refinery, planning for municipal water to Josephburg, the Josephburg Airport which now bears his name to mention a few, were either commissioned or initiated while Warren was on Council and Reeve. Warren's reputation during his years on Council and certainly as Reeve was that he was without question honest and ethical and a fighter for the people of Strathcona.

Normally when Political leaders want to meet leaders of larger municipalities or more senior governments then the smaller travels to meet the larger. That was not always true with Warren - I recall numerous times when Edmonton Mayors - Lawrence Decore and later Bill Smith would come to Warren's office and Deputy Prime Minister Don Mazankowski and Preston Manning would also come to see our Leader. They all had admiration and respect for Reeve Warren as did other leaders throughout the Province.

Warren was not always a delight to work with and on occasion when things were not moving fast enough or going in the right direction according to Warren's compass then he would become a little growly! I recall one day saying "what got into you? - you are like a bear with a sore paw!" The nick name stuck and the territory north of highway 16 was often referred to as "Bear County". The Bear side of him would pop up from time to time when things were getting tense and when Warren thought the NORTH needed more consideration, he would suggest that he might just take the Division 5 and the industry and start his own County. Bear pretty much always got his way!!!

Warren was especially proud that during his tenure on Council that he introduced the Invocation Prayer at the start of each Council Meeting. The first prayer was delivered by Pastor Percy Henkleman from Josephburg United Church. That practice continued for more

than 30 years with all denominations participating. Several other Alberta Municipalities then started following Strathcona's lead.

Warren role as Strathcona's protector and defender regarding battles with neighbouring Municipalities are legendary. He was a key figure in the annexation battles with Edmonton, Fort Saskatchewan and the Save our Strathcona Campaigns.

A friend of Warren's shared the following with me in the past few days

"I remember my early days as an elected County Councillor and attending regional meetings and meeting Warren for the first time. He was very approachable, gave you his full attention, had a reputation of being honest and had a high level of respect, gained by significant achievements for Strathcona County and area. He also has a very humorous side as well"

Honourable Ed Stelmach -Premier

All the while as Warren was leading Alberta's fourth largest Municipality he had time to continue developing his farming, ranching and animal raising. He stocked his fish farm with several 1000 trout annually, raised pot belly pigs, Jack Russel Terriers and African Bore Goats. Of course there was a large herd of Elk and a flock of Ostrich with hatchery.

I would like to relay a very short story which will give you insight into how Warren approached most everything in life. He arrived at the office one day and I was shocked about his appearance. He had black eyes, fat lip, cuts on his face and I could see his arms were bruised black and blue. I immediately assumed he had been in a serious vehicle wreck. Apparently one of his prize breeding Ostrich had escaped from the pen. Now for those not totally familiar with Ostrich I can tell you they stand 7 feet tall, they have amazing strength in their beaks and bite hard, they kick like a mule, and hit with their wings is like a man swinging a baseball bat and they can run like the wind. Well apparently without hesitation Warren

grabbed a rope and headed off after his investment. Eventually Warren caught up to Mr. Ostrich and an epic battle ensued. I am not sure what Mr. O looked like after the battle but I do know that he got a number of really solid shots on Warren but at the end of the day he was back in his pen where he belonged.

That was Warren's approach as a Councillor and Reeve and in life - he did what was necessary to get the job done.

In his later years after politics and animal adventures Warren continued innovating, building toys for his grandchildren, building grandfather clocks, doing soap stone carvings, building steel wheel benches that are now all over north America, potato guns, spending time fishing at Cameron's lake cabin and of course his prime passion - spending time with his family.

We will always remember Warren as a gentleman with a very infectious smile, being a risk taker, being so courageous and being a man who loved life and loved his family.

Farewell my friend.

Eric McGhan
September 11, 2018