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## Bishops leave Haliburton hand in hand

SUE TIFFIN

Staff Reporter

When the story of Bob and Noreen Bishops' life and death together is shared, there is much talk of firsts.

Born in Niagara-on-the-Lake in April, 1932, Bob first moved to Haliburton when he was nine. It was then he met Noreen Carnochan, who had been born in Haliburton in January, 1932. He only stayed a year before returning in 1947 when his parents, Robert Sr. and Jean purchased the Main Street Hotel and renamed it the Highlander Hotel.

Five years later, Bob and Noreen would marry. They raised five kids: Rob, Chris, John David, Angela and Steve.

Together, Bob and Noreen Bishop left their enduring mark on the Haliburton Highlands in numerous ways. Bob was a natural entrepreneur, following in the footsteps of his family, and Noreen was his ever-present support.

Bob worked for Mack Irwin in 1954, and with Newell and MacInerney Insurance and Real Estate in Minden in 1955, before the Bishops started R. J. Bishop and Son Real Estate in Haliburton in 1958.

see SKI page 8



### Teams rev up for coming season

JDHES senior Jaguars player Rynne Horsley runs the floor, staying ahead of Archie Stouffer Elementary School senior defenders during exhibition action on Thursday, April 5 in Haliburton. The after-school game hosted at the Haliburton middle school helps teams prepare for the season and allows loved ones to attend. /DARREN LUM Staff

## Haliburton's piper led life filled with song

*Earl Cooper had remarkable dedication to music, family, church and community*

JENN WATT

Editor

The Cooper house is one brimming with music. When Saturday rolls around, if there are people in the building they're likely on the fiddle, mandolin, piano or

raising their voice in song.

Those who have met the Coopers usually mention music in some way either through the choir at St. George's Anglican Church in Haliburton, visits to the Cooper home or Earl Cooper's role with Haliburton Highlanders Pipes and Drums, which he co-founded in 1970.

On March 31, at the age of 91, Earl Cooper died in the home where he was born in West Guilford, surrounded by music.

Earl's son George says his father's first

instrument was his grandmother's pump organ when Earl was a teenager.

"His father Stan and brother Al were both very good fiddlers and they used to play for the dance hall down at Maple Lake where the airport is now," George recalls. "But they needed somebody to put in the chording behind the fiddles. He learned to chord. Grandpa liked to tune the fiddle a half a tone down. Instead of chording on the white keys he had to

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# Ski hill boosted economic growth in Highlands

from page 1

"Dad and Grandfather had a lot of firsts in the county," said Steve Bishop, the youngest of Bob and Noreen's brood. "He mentioned it every time he drove by Mountain Lake, that he was the first real estate agent to sell a lakefront lot in Haliburton County for \$2,500. Everybody thought he was crazy, 'you'd never get that for a lakefront lot in Haliburton County.' And now it's that times 100."

Bob and his dad were doing many transactions with lawyers based in Toronto, so they spent much time driving back and forth to the city, a five- or six-hour drive each way back then.

"Grandfather said to Dad, 'this is ridiculous,'" said Steve. "We're spending all the time in the car, why don't you get your pilot's licence and we can fly back and forth and cut back the time."

Perhaps with the knowledge base of flying he had fine-tuned as a boy with a cardboard flight kit earned from a cereal box deal, Bob worked toward obtaining his pilot's licence, and the pair built an airstrip in Eagle Lake to help facilitate the trips.

Satisfied enough with work, but not so much the quality of television his family was watching at their Riverside Drive home, Bob had an idea.

"Back in the late '50s, early '60s, in Haliburton, TV was black and white, but it wasn't," said Chris Bishop. "It was grey and fuzzy. They never had black and white TV."

Together with a partner, Bob bought 3,000 feet of cable, ran it from his home up Riverside Drive, down through the Drag River, up on the telephone poles (with permission from the landowners), up to the top of the hill at Skyline Park, where the tower is now.

"He wired it up, plugged it in to the system down below and the TV was clear black and white," said Chris. "So what happened was, as the neighbours and friends all came to the house and saw the good TV, they all wanted to get hooked up, for free, which he did for awhile. And then he said, this doesn't make any sense, maybe I can make some money at this."

After research, Bob flew to Toronto to obtain a CRTC licence.

"He went to the CRTC office, the receptionist took his paperwork, and she said, 'come back in two hours,'" said Chris. "He went for lunch, came back in two hours and she said, 'Mr. Bishop, so-and-so will see you now.' Walked in, the guy stood up, shook his hand, and said, 'congratulations, Mr. Bishop, you have your licence from the CRTC.' So he came back to Haliburton and they wired up Minden and Haliburton for cable TV, and at the end of it there were about 1,400 customers."

In the early '80s, the Haliburton CATV Cable business was sold.

"But again, everyone said he was crazy," said Steve. "The bookkeeper said, 'oh, this business, you're never going to make this work.' Of course he did."

In 1965, the Bishops winterized the Highlander Hotel in order to bring winter clientele to feed the ski hills.

"Mom obviously supported him in everything he did," said Chris. "You had to have a willing partner for all of this stuff. She was raising us five kids, but when they bought the hotel in the spring of 1965, she hired about 12 ladies from Eagle Lake. The resort was run as a hunting and fishing lodge. There were communal washrooms, but they wanted to have 10 rooms with en suite bathrooms. Ron Sisson came in and renovated the place – they had to re-electrical it, re-plumb it, and the ladies came in and cleaned and painted it. They did that in 10 weeks. They took it from a two-season resort to a four-season resort in 10 weeks.



Here, the entire Bishop family, Bob and Noreen and their five children, Rob, Chris, JD, Angela and Steve stand in front of the original ski chalet built in 1965.



Bob and Noreen Bishop, who first met at age 9, married at the Bonnie View Inn in 1952. Their sons said last month they were the first couple in Ontario to be able to have a doctor-assisted death together in their own home. (Photos courtesy of the Bishop family)

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***They loved Haliburton. ... It was just such a big part of their life, and they were a big part of it here.***

— Chris Bishop

They had the grand opening – 500 people attended the grand opening, and 60 people stayed that night for a private dinner. All the newspapers were there and it was a big thing in Haliburton because it was the first four-season resort in Haliburton. And then that fall is when they put the T-bar in, cut the three trails, and started the ski hill."

Sir Sam's Ski and Ride is now one of only two original family-owned ski hills in Ontario, and celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2016.

"A lot of people don't understand the significance of, let alone, the ski hill – the economic driver it is for the whole community, because people drive from out of town to come here to ski, and buy gas, then there's people who buy a cottage or a property because there's a ski hill," said Chris. "Haliburton would have developed, but the ski hill was a big factor to make it grow faster and bring in people with more money because they wanted to ski."

Bob was involved in the building of 65 properties here, cottages or homes or buildings, most built with partner Ron Sisson. He developed and sold over 400 lakefront and chalet lots in the county. But he also directly impacted what Haliburton's downtown looks like today.

CIBC had their head office in a building Bob was visiting in Toronto. After an appointment with the CIBC head, an agreement was made that if Bob built the building, CIBC would come to Haliburton. And so in the early '70s, the Bishop Building on Highland Street, which still houses the CIBC today, was developed. Bob and Noreen then opened the first licenced restaurant in Haliburton with the lower area of the building becoming a state-of-the-art restaurant and bar called the Highland Fling. It would later be destroyed by vandalism.

Of all the firsts, the one that matters most to the Bishop family is their parents' emphasis on family.

"The kids always came first," said Chris.

"Without Mother, ... Dad couldn't have done any of this," said Steve. "She not only raised five kids, but worked her butt off to help bring all of this into fruition. She was an amazing woman."

Noreen had had a simple life growing up, with no water in the house, no electricity, and eight siblings.

"She helped look after [the younger siblings], which turned out for us to be amazing because she was the most amazing mother you can ever imagine," said Steve.

Noreen had a strong work ethic, and alongside her role as mother, she played a key role at the hotel and at the ski hill. The kids remember magical holidays with army men presents arranged on a table for Christmas morning, and Noreen fully decked out in costume for Halloween. The neighbourhood was brought together by Bob's dad building the first personal swimming pool in Haliburton County, and Noreen ensured the kids stayed close to home by filling the house with food and hospitality for them and their friends. And the kids did stay close, with four of the five choosing to live in Haliburton like their parents.

"They loved Haliburton," said Chris. "They loved their life in 'My Haliburton Highlands,' that was Mom's line [in their obituary]. It was just such a big part of their life, and they were a big part of it here."

"They said it many times, they didn't want to travel because they loved it right here," said Steve. "There was no need to go anywhere else, this was the best place in the world. They lived and loved in Haliburton and it was important to them."

"Grandfather told them, you're never going to get rich, but you'll have a good life in Haliburton – a great lifestyle, and meet lots of people," said Chris. "They just really cared about the community. They cared about Haliburton and did what they could do."

Last month, Bob and Noreen Bishop experienced their final first when they died in a pre-appointed medically-assisted death, together. About two years ago, Noreen's health began failing as a result of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and congestive heart failure.

"She was going downhill rapidly," said Chris, who said Noreen was brought to her home in Eagle Lake from the hospital at that time for what were expected to be her final days. "That was her wish. Then she got home and she rallied around a little bit. She never got back to the health she had before she went into the hospital, but she had a reasonable quality of life."

Four years ago, Bob had fallen and had a sore side. An X-ray revealed kidney cancer, so at 82, his family all gathered to say goodbye to him because he might not have pulled through the surgery. Bob recovered, but about a year and a half ago, he had some pain in his shoulder.

"He went in and found out he had bone cancer, brain cancer, stomach cancer and lung cancer," said Chris. "Stage 4," added Steve.

An experimental chemo pill helped prevent the cancer from growing for six months.

"Three months ago, the doctor said, 'it's growing in your brain, you've got more spots,'" said Chris. "They said, we can put you on another different chemo, but the side effects won't be any good. It might prolong your life by a couple of months. [Dad] said, 'forget it, I'm just going to enjoy the time that I have here now.'"

When Chris was about 20 and his dad was in his early 40s, he remembers him saying to a pharmacist friend, "look, when I get old, and I'm going to go, you've got to make sure there's a pill that I can take, because I don't want to be suffering."

"That was the way he was," said Chris. "He wasn't a real religious man. He believed something was out there, but he didn't really believe in formal religion ... That was the way he felt. So he and Mom were very close, they always talked about, 'we're going to go together.'"

Bob and Noreen had purchased plots for their own family and headstones for their final resting space years before.

see page 9

# 'The process was so dignified and respectful'

from page 8

"They always talked about, we're going to go together, not knowing what that looked like," said Chris. "In a perfect world, yeah. In the practical world, it doesn't make sense."

About five months ago, Bob asked his doctor about assisted death. Since assisted dying became legal in Canada in June 2016, more than 2,000 people living with terminal illnesses have qualified for the process.

Under Bill C-14, two independent health-care professionals assess a patient for eligibility. Individuals must be 18 or older and have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability; be in an advanced state of irreversible decline in capability; endure physical and psychological suffering that is intolerable to them; and their natural death has to have become reasonably foreseeable, in order to qualify. Bob qualified, and soon after, it turned out that Noreen qualified too, a rare possibility itself.

But as plans began to fall into place, the family realized the pair would be able to die on the same day, together in their Eagle Lake home.

"They never had one hesitation that they shouldn't be doing this," said Chris. "They never had ... they were just so ready to leave this world and that they were able to do it in a way that wasn't going to have a negative impact on us with regards to us that they were in a hospital or we had to go visit them, the logistics could have got really bad, really fast. We were all just so grateful that this was going to be able to happen, and they were so grateful. My parents were never complainers. Even when my dad would come over to the chalet, and I'd [only] hear the

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*They went the way they wanted to go. ... We had such a celebration on Monday and then they went in such a dignified and glorious way – it's a beautiful, uplifting story.*

— Chris Bishop

next day how sick he was. When he was around us and other people, you never knew, he was always steady on the level. He just didn't want anyone else to be feeling his pain or worrying about him."

"The whole time, their health was deteriorating rapidly," said Steve. "We were quite concerned that they weren't going to make it to the day that was set. Or fall down and go into a coma."

"You have to be able to give consent the day of," said Chris. "We knew for three weeks the date was set. Our fear was that they were going to get to that point where they both couldn't go together. Or one would be in the hospital, or..."

"And even the doctors were concerned," said Steve. "We were on pins and needles. If one had had a stroke or if they couldn't give consent on the last day ... it wasn't going to happen for one of them or both of them or whatever. That's

how ill they were, everyone was on pins and needles, so when they made it to the final day, it was another relief."

As the day came closer, Chris said anxiety turned to relief as the Bishop kids realized their parents – who kept their decision largely private from anyone else – were going to be able to plan their end-of-life together.

"Yes, we're here, they've made it, it's all going to happen," said Chris. "They're getting their wish. That was the best thing. We didn't want them to leave, but we knew it was going to be the best thing for them and for us because health-wise it was all going to fall apart really fast."

"It takes a lot of courage," said Steve. "But when you're suffering ... we don't know what it's like to suffer like that. I know it was a relief. They weren't scared to do it. They were happy to have it stop."

"They didn't want another five minutes," said Chris. "They were like, let's go five minutes earlier."

"If they could have upped it a week, they would have," said Steve.

"This system will allow less burden and trauma and heartache for the family, and then the health-care system – it's going to save the health-care system millions and millions of dollars," said Chris. "Death is always [thought to be] a scary thing. We've stood there and witnessed and watched it. It wasn't scary at all. They weren't scared. The process was so dignified and respectful."

On Monday, March 26, the five Bishop children and their spouses joined Bob and Noreen in their beloved Eagle Lake home for a celebration of their parents' life.

"We had good food and champagne and we laughed and we cried and told stories," said Chris. "We were there for about four hours. It was just a beautiful –

you don't normally have a celebration of life when they're still alive. So it was just very, very touching and beautiful."

"We'd already said goodbye on many occasions, many times," said Steve. "This was just one last time to experience it, celebrate it."

"It's really uplifting," said Chris. "One minute you're having a good laugh with your family, siblings and stories with your mom and dad, and you know that tomorrow they're going to be gone. It's surreal. We've never been down anything like this. But it was, my sister described it, it was the most wonderful 48 hours. It was uplifting and their attitude was so positive."

The next day, with their children by their side, Bob and Noreen crawled into their bed in their pyjamas, settling in for what they had been calling, "the big launch."

"They held hands, laid back with smiles on their faces, and said goodbye," said Steve. "And away they went."

According to Chris, the Bishops were the first couple in Ontario to be able to have a doctor-assisted death together in their own home, and the second in Canada.

"I know there are lots of people who don't believe in it or are against it, but if they could have seen, and been through what we went through, it was just [such a] dignified, respectful, beautiful, caring moment that I'm not sad because they had a great life," said Chris. "They went the way they wanted to go. ... We had such a celebration on the Monday and then they went in such a dignified and glorious way – it's a beautiful, uplifting story."

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