



History Update

Justice George Stephen Gage

Joseph Thomas Kostyk

No Ordinary Joe

The nineteen sixties was an era in the Hamilton Legal community dominated by boisterous characters who were larger than life – the three Johns – Agro, White and Bowlby – Frank Weatherston – Lincoln Alexander – Magistrate Tuchtie – Judge John Latchford and a host of others, but none had a more prominent presence than big Joe Kostyk.

Joe was born on May 11, 1930, the son of Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up in the hard scrabble northeast end of Hamilton. The neighbourhood was dominated by the steel mills and factories, and the “public houses” where the workers slaked their thirst and drowned their sorrows.



PAULSON - MOM & DAD

Joseph excelled at both academics and athletics. He was a football star at Delta Secondary, but his passion was baseball. His talent as a pitcher for the

Double-A team in Brantford attracted the attention of the St. Louis Cardinals who recruited young Joe and gave him a signing bonus to attend their training camp. Joe went for a short stay but his mother’s insistence that a proper education was more important than baseball carried the day and Joe left St. Louis and entered McMaster University.



In the meantime, he caught the eye of the lovely Shelagh O’Reilly – daughter of prominent local lawyer J.P. O’Reilly. Romanced blossomed and marriage and two children followed.

McMaster was followed by Osgoode Hall and Joe was called to the bar in 1958. Following his call to the bar Joe joined his friend and classmate, John Jaskula in forming a general practice firm to provide legal services to the community he grew up in. They opened an office on Barton Street East at Lottridge. The office was open on Saturdays to accommodate the working men and women who could not take time away from their shift. Joe was one of the few lawyers in town who did house calls. The proximity of his office to Civic Stadium (later Ivor Wynne) combined with Joe’s naturally gregarious nature attracted the fellowship of many Tiger Cat players including Joe Zuger and Tommy Grant who became lifelong friends. Joe wound up representing a number of professional athletes including Don Sutherin, Joe Restic and Ron Murphy.



Joe’s general practice had an entrepreneurial bent. He was instrumental in the formation of Tiger Snacks, World Airways, Hamilton Mountain Co-axial and Video Station – a precursor of Blockbuster.

Joe was also a part of the “Aero Restaurant Gang” – a group of political junkies that plotted the many successful campaigns of John Munro in Hamilton East.

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Justice Gage was born and raised in Hamilton, was called to the bar in 1979 and carried on a litigation practice in Hamilton until his appointment to the Ontario Court of Justice in 2003. He presided in Toronto to 2008, in Brampton from 2009 to 2015 and in Hamilton since 2015. Justice Gage recently retired from full time assignment but continues to preside on an occasional basis as a per diem judge.



Joe entered the political arena himself. From 1960-62 and 1964-70 Joe served as the elected alderman for Ward Four.

During his time on City Council, he was known as a fierce advocate for his constituents and an enthusiastic Hamilton booster. When he took exception to the portrayal of his hometown in the NFB film "Pardon My Lunch Bucket", he petitioned the Prime Minister to remove the offending film from circulation and destroy all the copies. A prophet before his time, he was an advocate for infrastructure renewal, and the importance of public transit. Joe played a key role in the development of Jackson Square, and the re-development of Gore Park.

Joe also found the time in his busy schedule to teach business classes at McMaster.



Health issues eventually led to retirement from the practice of law. He died in 2011 at the age of 81.

Joe Kostyk had a big frame, big hands, a big smile and a huge heart. He was, without question, "Not Your Average Joe". ■

