

■ OBITUARY: Dan O'Regan

# Labour leader 'larger than life'

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Expositor Staff

Activist Dan O'Regan, who died Thursday after a heart attack, is being remembered as a "larger than life" presence on the local labour scene.

He was 66.

"It came as a real shock because I thought he was doing pretty well, health-wise," his wife, Audrey, said Tuesday. "He had battled colon cancer a couple of years ago and had really built himself back up since then.

"I wasn't aware of any other problems."

Mr. O'Regan came to Brantford from England in 1971 and worked at White Farm, where he became involved with the United Auto Workers. He was a member of the union local's executive for many years holding the position of treasurer and was also a past president of the Brantford and District Labour Council.

Mr. O'Regan was a past president of the Family Service Bureau, now known as the Family Counselling Centre of Brant and always participated in the labour council's annual Labour Day celebration.

"He was as tough as nails negotiator and would take on anybody and people respected him for that," Doug Aitchison, another longtime labour union activist, said. "But, at the same time, he was the guy who was out there at the soap box derby at the top of the hill helping the kids get ready for their race.

"He loved the kids and he looked forward to being out there with them every year."

Aitchison was 16 when he went to work at White Farm and met Mr. O'Regan.

"He encouraged me to get involved in the union and, yeah, he was a mentor to me," Aitchison said. "For me, he was larger than life at the soap box derby and at union meetings."

Bonnie Tubman and her late husband, Jack, were longtime friends of O'Regan. And, together, they were at the forefront of the city's labour movement.

"He had this big laugh that would just take over a room," Tubman said. "He was a big man and for a lot of us he was larger than life."

Her favourite story goes back to the time they were reported to have "taken over" the Family Service Bureau.

"Audrey and I were talking about that the other day and having a big laugh about it," Tubman recalled. "We had heard some workers hadn't been treated well by the board and we thought we should get some labour people on it.

"We decided to run a slate of candidates and, when it came time, our candidates went to the meeting with all of their supporters."

What they didn't realize was

attempt in The Expositor and, to this day, Tubman and those who were there chuckle about how it was all reported.

O'Regan and Tubman both ended up serving as president of the Family Service Bureau, she said.

Mr. O'Regan also was involved in the Brantford Minor Sports Association and worked on political campaigns on behalf of the New Democratic Party helping former Brant MP Derek Blackburn get elected.

More recently, Mr. O'Regan was in the landscaping business, looking after a number of customers, wife Audrey said.

"He had a lot of determination," she said. "When he saw something that was wrong, he did everything he could to fix it and make it right. He would just go for it.

"He was always so reliable. I knew I could count on him and others knew that as well."

One of the most telling moments came a few years ago when their grandson, Cameron Brown, got married.

"Cameron asked Dan to be the best man at his wedding," O'Regan said. "I think that says a lot about Dan and the type of person he was.

"That's something that doesn't happen very often."

In addition to his wife, Mr. O'Regan is also survived by stepchildren Jill Brown, Ken Savory and Erie Savory, as well as many grandchildren. He is also survived by his sisters, Kay and Marie, in England, and his sister, Breda, and brother Neil in Ireland.

Mr. O'Regan was predeceased by his brother, Andrew.

A memorial service for Mr. O'Regan will be held June 16 at 11 a.m. at Hill and Robinson Funeral Home and Cremation Centre, 30 Nelson St.

