



OPINION EDITORIAL

Citizen of the Year dedicated to the cause



By Dave Dawson, Orillia Packet & Times
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ROBERTA BELL/THE PACKET & TIMES – Colin Wackett, who is battling prostate cancer, but has stayed on as the longtime chair of the Huronia Ride for Dad, waves to riders as they depart on the event.

In 1999, Colin Wackett found out he had prostate cancer, a diagnosis that dramatically changed his life. He fought the dreaded disease and won. But it was only the beginning of the story for the affable Orillia man, who is the much-deserved winner of the Packet & Times' 2016 Citizen of the Year Award.

Upon his diagnosis, Wackett quickly learned prostate cancer was too often claiming its victims because so many men refused to talk about the sensitive topic of "male plumbing" and opted not to submit to simple checkups that could detect the potentially fatal disease. Wackett quickly became motivated to change that. He threw his considerable organizational skills and passion into trying to change that deadly male stasis. His desire – remember, this was almost two decades ago – was to ignite a conversation, to raise awareness and to raise money to help find a cure for prostate cancer. There is no doubt his efforts have saved the lives of many. "It's a big motivator to make sure other men don't have to go through what former and current survivors or sufferers of prostate cancer have to go through," Wackett told the Packet in 2010.

Wackett, for more than 15 years, has served as chair and convener of the Orillia Prostate Cancer Awareness Group, and organized monthly meetings with informative speakers; the assembly has become a support group for local men and their families.

He was also instrumental in spearheading the Huronia Motorcycle Ride for Dad – one of the largest such rides in the country. Over the years the annual local ride has raised more than \$1 million. Wackett is its driving force and, each year, he enthusiastically waves each rider off the starting line. His role in its success was so pivotal, the Motorcycle Ride for Dad of Canada created the President’s Award to honour his commitment to the cause. “If we had a whole bunch of him in different places across the country, it would be a great benefit to the cause,” sa national ride captain Byron Smith.

When he received that award at a Calgary event in 2010, an emotional Wackett deflected the praise. “I just happen to be the guy that speaks for them,” he said of the 100 volunteers who annually work to ensure the local event’s success. “They are the people that really are the backbone of this whole organization, the people who step forward to help.”

While those volunteers are critical, it wouldn’t have succeeded without Wackett’s contagious enthusiasm and passion. He is also passionate about the work of the Royal Canadian Legion and has volunteered his time and talents to the local branch for more than two decades, servin in countless roles – including a term as president. He has spearheaded the annual Ukrainian Businessmen Golf Tournament, a charitable fundraiser, for more than a decade and has been a constant force behind the scenes to ensure the success of the OPP Kids Fishing Day at Orillia Perch Festival.

Now in his 80s, with his health flagging, Wackett continues to selflessly give his time and effort to the causes near and dear to his heart. He is an inspiration, a man who has worked tirelessly – on his own time – to make Orillia a better, more caring and healthy community. Thank you.

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