

LOCAL NEWS

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Truro mourns the loss of its 'Music Man'

Ron MacKay was 'like an ambassador for band music everywhere he went'

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Truro music fans are mourning the death of beloved music teacher Ron MacKay who passed away in Dartmouth on Monday. He was the driving force behind the Truro school bands program becoming one of the most prominent programs in Atlantic Canada.

TRURO DAILY NEWS

TRURO – The architect of Truro's school bands program has died.

Ron MacKay took over a newly formed band program at Truro Junior High School (TJHS) in the mid-1960s and was instrumental in growing it to national recognition. He passed away Monday in Dartmouth following a fight with cancer. He was 79.

"It's quite a shock. When you talk about music in Truro you talk about Mr. MacKay," said Truro Mayor Bill Mills. "It's a great loss for the community."

MacKay came to Truro from the Royal Canadian Artillery Band in Halifax, becoming the first conductor of the Truro Concert Band and the first full-time music teacher at TJHS. In 1964, a former closet under the stairs to the Victoria Street school's basement became MacKay's office.

But from those humble beginnings a program that became the envy of many communities across the province was formed. The Truro Schools Concert Band performed at the world's fair, Expo '67, in Montreal as well in Ottawa. The band also took trips to the United States, Bermuda and England.

“He was one of the early influences in school bands in Nova Scotia,” said Ken Henderson, a former music teacher at TJHS and a former band member. “He was like an ambassador for band music everywhere he went.”

When Cobequid Educational Centre opened in 1970, MacKay became its first music teacher.

“That tradition of excellence ... began with him,” said Truro-Bible Hill MLA Jamie Muir.

Some people credit MacKay with helping them through school while others considered him a mentor. As he built the music program, he inspired many to become professional musicians and others into music education.

“He was an inspiration to a great many people, myself included,” said Paul Barrett. “Many of these people have made music their life.”

MacKay was Barrett's first band director at TJHS and the main reason he went into education. He worked with MacKay at CEC and took over the program when MacKay retired in 1991.

While MacKay ran a top-notch band it was by no means an elitists program.

“Despite his emphasis on excellence he had a ... place for everybody,” said Muir, who served on the band auxiliary and was a faculty member at CEC. “He created a spot for everybody regardless how skilled or how unskilled they were.”