

I was lucky enough to move to the Knockan Hill area of Victoria in 2002, and quickly discovered what a wonderful little park it is. Soon enough, one of my neighbours talked me into coming out on a Saturday, to help out with a Broom Bash. The crew included the usual assortment of young and old, rookies and veterans, the curious and the committed.

Anyway, when I first met Rex Welland, pulling broom in the park, he first seemed to be just another old guy with a hat. This was, however, a false assumption, as it soon became clear that Rex was nothing if not unique. After all, he had brought along his wheelbarrow to the event, and the wheelbarrow sported curious aluminum extensions welded in place reminiscent of a horned beast or perhaps a modern art piece. In addition, it was clear he knew his way around the park, and not just the official trails either. He was able to size up the strength of the day's recruits and set folks to work in locations that turned out to be just right for our relative talents. Soon, as the piles of broom mounted, Rex fell to with his barrow and I discovered what the aluminum extensions were for; a simple solution to the unwieldy mass of the scotch broom that needed to be hauled across the park. By building the extensions, Rex tripled the carrying capacity of the wheelbarrow and provided a concrete example of his practical nature.

Over the next several years however, I grew to respect and treasure Rex as a valuable member of the community. Rex was a civilian employee at the Department of National Defense, and was an engineer. I don't know exactly what he did in that capacity but his colleagues spoke very highly of him.

As Broom Bash followed Broom Bash, I could always count on Rex's presence to keep us working at full capacity. Later, after becoming a board member of the Friends of Knockan Hill Park, I found out that Rex had built all three of the park's interpretation boards, all slightly different to account for each specific site and all slightly improved.

When the time came to build a new trail in the park, Rex showed up with yet another surprise. This was his electric garden tractor, complete with trailer. He had purchased it after the first energy crisis, back in the seventies, and had used it ever since. Thus we were able to haul yard after yard of gravel, while maintaining the park's tranquility, and with a lot less effort than if we had had to rely on just hand-pushed wheelbarrows!

At other times, while I might read in the local paper about planned developments in the area, and simply sigh and shake my head, the old guy with the hat would turn up at my door with facts and figures at the ready, a petition to sign and the date of the next council meeting to attend. This continued right up to his death I should add, as just a few months before he passed away he was still taking the

time to educate his neighbours about yet another development proposal a few blocks away.

From my perspective, Rex was part of the fabric of the community. He was always there to volunteer, to help out with his labour but also to plan and organize. When the municipal traffic engineers wanted to widen the road and cut down a number of oak trees, Rex was able to uncover the exact location of gas lines and other infrastructure elements, figure out a solution and then reason with the municipal staff and help with modifying their engineering plans to widen the road while saving the trees.

I'd like to share some lessons I learnt from watching Rex. Select a career that you find meaningful and do your best at it but don't allow your job to define your life. Find some hobbies that have some depth and social relevance and do your best at those. Most importantly, be part of your community and pay attention to what is going on at the local level. Volunteer, pay attention and offer solutions instead of arguments. Develop well prepared background material and do your research before meeting with officials. Listen. Enjoy watching the sunset, seeing the seasons change and the flowers blooming. And lastly, never assume that the old guy with the hat isn't worthy of respect, because he might be, like Rex Welland, a champion in disguise.

David Trudel, July 2009