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NORTH VANCOUVER'S MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT

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An inspiring legacy of civic generosity

Karl Winter passed away on the final day of 2021 at the age of 82 - leaving a legacy of civic generosity for which the North Shore will be forever grateful.

A co-founder of North Shore Rescue 57 years ago, Karl was a mountain rescue legend whose life provides a beacon of inspiration at a time when we are all in need of some light and a reminder of what is possible when good people do good things.

Less than a week after his passing, North Shore Rescue reported a record-setting 226 callouts in 2021 –testimony to the high need for this service on the North Shore and beyond, to the skill and dedication of its 50-plus volunteer rescue professionals, and to the evolution of Canada's most famous – and busiest - volunteer search and rescue team.

It's a gift the likes of which Karl could never have imagined that day in 1965, when he and a friend answered a newspaper ad for civil defense volunteers. Karl's specialty was mountaineering which he learned growing up in Germany. Within three years of his arrival in Canada with no English, he was teaching mountaineering and was a member of the Mountain Rescue Group – a predecessor to North Shore Rescue.

Within a few short years, the Cold War era requirement for a civil defense corps was outstripped by the need for a search and rescue team as the North Shore's population grew, and along with it, the popularity of the local mountains and trails.

“Bushwackers”

Karl was North Shore Rescue's first Team Leader and along with brothers Dave and Gerry Brewer, one of its founders. In a recent tribute, Gerry Brewer credited Karl with transforming a group of “bushwackers” - as Karl jokingly called them – into the beginning of a mountain rescue group.

They responded to 4 to 6 callouts a year in those early days. Using their own rudimentary equipment, long before GPS and cellphones, they developed many search and rescue

protocols that are still the training standard today.

Innovation was the name of the game. They became pioneers in things like treating hypothermia in the field and fixed-line helicopter extractions. When they were looking to increase their wilderness search skills, they enlisted the help of the U.S. Border Patrol which had expertise in human tracking. Before long, Karl and his dedicated group of North Shore bushwhackers were influencing search and rescue practices throughout North America.

Over the years, as they built the community support that sustains North Shore Rescue, they provided concentric ripples of opportunity for others on the North Shore to practice civic generosity: dozens of corporate sponsors, fundraisers like Rotary's Ride for Rescue, and the West Van teenager who raised thousands making and selling North Shore Rescue-branded toques and socks.

Extraordinary people

The team also became a magnet for other extraordinary people able to meet their exacting standards and willing to sacrifice countless volunteer hours training and on rescues at all times of day in all kinds of weather. People like Tim Jones, who died unexpectedly in 2014 and Dr. Ian Taylor, the team's first physician who passed away this past year.

As Karl and other ‘originals’ pass the baton forward, the next generation of North Shore Rescue volunteer professionals includes members of their own families - Karl's son Greg, Tim Jones' son Curtis and Allan Danks' son Mike - North Shore Rescue's current Team Leader.

All of us hope that at the end of the day, our lives will have made a difference. As we reflect on the possibilities and opportunities ahead when this pandemic is finally behind us, one of the legacies of Karl Winter, and those like him, is that each of us has the potential to practice civic generosity and make our communities better for our having been here.

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