

BROCK'S BANTER: On This Harvest Moon

By Brock Weir

There is no greater temptation than to begin this week's column with a few choice lyrics from Neil Young's classic song, Old Man. It might seem fitting for what's to come but nobody really needs to be subjected to an earworm featuring the vocal sounds of the iconic Canadian balladeer who, after more than five decades in the music business, is still trying to find a note he can hit. But, then again, maybe I should because as I write this sitting at my office desk on this chilly Thanksgiving morning I just found myself glancing to my left.

There is something different on my wall of memorabilia.

When I left the office on Friday the wall featured an I Love Lucy calendar, a couple of framed LPs, a handful of thank you cards received from people over the years and a tattered plastic banner wishing me a Happy Birthday from back when I was on the right side of 30.

But the autumn sun has caught hold of something shiny: silver-coloured tack pinning a yellowed newspaper cut out of Neil Young himself just below two hand-held flags leftover from the Aurora leg of the Pan Am Torch run.

There is only one explanation: this is a parting gift from Bob Ince.

This past Friday, our office team gathered at a local restaurant to give an impromptu fond farewell to our long-time general manager after over a decade-and-a-half with The Auroran.

While Bob will still be working with a few local clients in this new chapter of his life, he and his wife Lynn have made the momentous decision to move to the Fort Erie area after nearly 30 years in Aurora.

Bob and Lynn joined us for the farewell party, which was enlightening in itself.

For example, it is probably a safe bet to assume few people in this community know that Bob is known as 'Princess' in the vicinity of Omar's Shoes.

'Why is that?' I asked Mae Khamissa, who so-dubbed him.

The nickname apparently stems from the fact Bob could never be described as handy around the house. Sure, he might be able to change a lightbulb but anything beyond that could cause a water main break or a complete blackout through Aurora's west side.

This point was illustrated in two ways on Friday: First, Bob proudly regaled us with a story of successfully installing a new shower head in his new digs the night before. Second, Ms. Khamissa produced a plastic Princess tiara from her purse to be worn by the guest of honour, which he did with pride.

In turn, we each said a few words about Bob's contribution not just to our office

but the community as a whole. The comments were lighthearted, of course, but there was a common thread among them: Bob is a man who cares about his community.

On a personal note, I first met Bob

nearly 10 years ago working as a summer student in the community between my second and third years at Carleton University.

I quickly came to realise the Tuesday routine.

Bob would pull into our parking lot laden down with fresh copies of The Auroran. He would put a stack of them on our front table and then pull two or three copies from the top of the pile and bring them over to the counter which separated the waiting room from the rest of the office.

This he did smacking down the stack of papers with a dramatic flourish tempered by a serious frown.

Quickly and invariably this serious frown gave way to a sunny smile (A sunny smile from Bob? Yes, I know, but bear with me?). He would take a pen - and not an ordinary, everyday ballpoint - out of his shirt pocket and ponder for a second. Then the pen would go to work writing out a wonderfully snide remark to our manager on the front page of one issue and a few friendly greetings to my other coworkers on the fronts of the others.

This was just step one of this process.

Then, the issue with the snappy remark would once again rise to the top and Bob would leaf through each page putting panned dots beside each article that might be of special interest to this particular office. This step was repeated almost to the letter with the other newspapers in the personalized stack, sometimes switched up just a little bit to tailor this curated collection of articles for the individual reader.

To me, this showed the measure of the man: this was a guy who had his finger on the pulse of the community and did so with a genuine concern for its wellbeing, a particular attention to his clients as a sales representative here at the paper, and an offbeat sense

of humour.

Five years later, joining The Auroran, it was soon clear that these first impressions made so long ago were just about spot on. From that vantage point, I was able to see all of these qualities ? and more ? in action from taking part in meetings with potential advertisers, being on the receiving end of some very niche story ideas, and observing his term as President of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce up close.

What I didn't bank on, however, was his atrocious taste in music.

I should have left well enough alone.

One day I made the rookie mistake of making my true feelings for Neil Young known while Bob was ensconced in his office listening to a live recording of Harvest Moon.

From that point on, just to get the better of me, and when I least suspected it, Mr. Young's caterwauling would suddenly start wailing throughout the office.

Thanks, Bob ? and good luck, Fort Erie!