

Elszie Banks recipient of Charles E. Brooks Labour award

By Dave Hall, Windsor Star November 11, 2010



Ellsworth Banks is the recipient of this year's Charles E. Brooks Labour Community Service Award. Photograph by: SCOTT WEBSTER, The Windsor Star

WINDSOR, Ont. – For the first time in 57 years, Elszie Banks won't be hunting with as many as two dozen buddies in Northern Ontario this weekend.

Instead, he'll be surrounded by family, friends and supporters at the Caboto Club Friday when he receives the Charles E. Brooks Labour Community Service Award.

"I've been going hunting this particular weekend with my buddies for almost 60 years," Banks said recently. "But this is a great reason to miss one.

"Charlie was a great guy and I'm honoured and excited to receive this award," said Banks, now 82 and a twice-married father of seven.

A longtime committee person and volunteer with CAW Locals 195 and 200 as well as vice-president of the Windsor and District Labour Council for more than 20 years, Banks has been involved with the local labour community since he worked at the old Walker Metal plant back in 1946.

Banks, a Harrow native, started working on his family's farm as a child and began working even longer hours at age 12 when his father injured his leg in a farming accident.

"I did everything," said Banks, laughing. "I worked a horse team, did disking, milked cows and ran a tractor. Neighbours knew I'd do anything and they kept asking me to help out."

In the winters, Banks moved inside and worked at a series of plants before joining Ford Motor Company and starting a 37-year career in the old foundry.

He spent five years in Oakville after being laid off locally before returning to Windsor when his seniority paid off in another position at Ford.

"I was a midnight steward for a few years, I helped out with various committees and I just made myself available to do whatever needed doing," said Banks, who will share Friday with wife Teresa and 20 other family members. "I always fought for the workers in any plant I worked at over the years."

In addition to his labour commitments, Banks has coached in the Ford Hockey League for 32 years and only retired as a player about 10 years ago after breaking his ankle while on a hunting trip.

In 2009, Banks' teams won the FHL titles in both the junior and hockey divisions.

"I still do my exercises to keep in shape but what really keeps me young is being active every day," said Banks, who also coached baseball for many years.

He says he has no regrets about his commitment to the labour movement but wishes "some of the younger guys were more involved.

"It's frustrating at time for an old guy like me," said Banks, who acts as sergeant-at-arms with the Ford retirees chapter. "We have about 3,000 retirees and we're lucky if we get 250 to a meeting."

Dave Crosswell, financial secretary of Local 200, said an incident at Banks' 80th birthday captured the type of individual he is.

"A young guy, maybe in his '30s, got up to speak," said Crosswell. "He recalled that as a child, he wanted to play hockey but his mom couldn't afford it. It turned out he lived near Elsie who heard about the youngster's plight and took it upon himself to arrange for equipment and get the young boy to the rink every week.

"I'm guessing there are others out there with similar stories," said Crosswell. "At the local, he's always been there for us, for every event from marches to BBQs.

"I know this sounds corny but I'm so excited about Friday night because Elsie's such a wonderful guy," said Crosswell.

Banks said he doesn't have a long speech planned for tonight.

"I'll say a few words," said Banks, laughing. "But I'd rather work behind the scenes and let the other guys run their mouths."

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