

He turned the LCBO into a powerhouse. What could he have done for Sarnia?

Chris Cooke - February 2024

I can't help but wonder what Sarnia would be if Andy Brandt had been the city's mayor for the past 35 years instead of Mike Bradley.

Brandt, nicknamed "action Andy" passed away following a brief illness just before Christmas and was recognized for his accomplishments at a celebration of life in mid-January.

A former alderman, a former mayor and an interim leader of the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, Brandt was known for his accomplishments.

And there were many.

Brandt was instrumental in getting provincial money for the 402 highway, provincial money for Sarnia Bay Marina, which was recently renamed in his honour and assisted the private sector in rebuilding downtown.

During his tenure at Queen's Park he was environment minister and later minister of industry and trade before taking a three year stint as interim leader of the Conservative Party. Mike Harris took the party leadership in 1990 and Brandt never sought re-election.

He didn't have to because Bob Rae and his NDP government leaned on Brandt to head the then fledgling Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

A businessman with business credentials who had a vivid understanding of money and where it comes from, Brandt immediately took charge pivoting a rather shabby group of under-performing liquor stores into a business powerhouse that dropped \$3 billion to the bottom line.

He actually put kitchens in liquor stores noting "if you are going to cook you might as well have a drink."

Brandt loved politics, loved people and was attracted to microphones, especially television microphones.

I can remember interviewing him on the front steps of city hall for CFPL TV shortly after he became mayor in 1975. The topic was construction delays on the 402.

I'm 6'2" and Brandt wasn't.

He insisted on standing a step or two above me and at one point wanted to hold the microphone. When the interview, which developed into a rant ended he took his hand off the microphone and asked "how's that?"

He was aware that radio and television reporters like sound bites and would ask "what do I have 30 or 40 seconds?"

A consummate entertainer, a consummate salesman, Brandt ran the Academy of Musical Arts where he sold musical instruments and lessons before turning his sights on politics in the early 1970s.

While he occasionally bumped heads with Bradley there was a civility between them.

Brandt was a doer.

Bradley not so much and Brandt's displeasure with Bradley and his left leaning administration would periodically bubble over.

A case in point was the 25th anniversary of the Rotary Club of Sarnia Bluewaterland.

Brandt was the guest speaker.

His focus was a lack of growth and development in a city run by a Liberal mayor and a like minded administration.

Brandt honed in on Sarnia's population of 73,000 suggesting to the Rotarians it was closer to 69,000.

That was then. This is now.

Not much has changed in the six years since he spoke.

Sarnia's assessment remains stalled. Its population base has stagnated. And the only real progress is at city hall where bureaucrats do less and make more.

Andy Brandt could have been wrong about this.

I could be wrong about this.

But in a stagnating city that appears to be anti business, development charges are exploding and surrounding mayors make fun of us I don't think so.

The late Andrew S. Brandt is probably rolling in his grave.

I could be wrong about this but I'm likely not.