

The world could use another Action Andy Brandt

Dan McCaffery - February 2024

A lot of people have had a great deal of praise for Andy Brandt since his death just before Christmas.

But the various tributes, as heartfelt as they may have been, don't begin to do him justice.

Brandt, who served as a city alderman, mayor and Member of Provincial Parliament, among other things, was by far and away the best politician I have seen during my 50-years of observing local politics.

We all know about his long list of impressive achievements. Without him it would have taken decades longer to get Highway 402 built, if it was built at all. The same is true of Sarnia Bay Marina (which is now named for Andy). Ditto for downtown redevelopment.

What made Brandt so effective is that he didn't just wait for things to happen, he got off his butt and made them happen.

With Highway 402, for example, he went so far as to threaten to quit as MPP unless the government approved the project. And because the Conservatives were clinging to power by a single seat, they could ill afford to have one of their more popular MPPs simply walk away. So they caved in to his demands and the 402 became a reality. When the chips were down Andy put his career on the line rather than watch a vitally important project go down the drain.

When it came to downtown redevelopment, Mayor Brandt led the charge. He got out of his city hall office, went to Toronto and made a pitch to the board of directors of the T. Eaton Company, convincing them to locate a department store in Sarnia's core.

He also played a key role in securing grant money from the province for downtown projects. As a result the west side of Front Street, which looked like a rat-infested slum, was transformed into an impressive string of high rise buildings, complete with a public walkway on the riverfront.

Few people give him any credit for it, but Brandt also played an important role in securing new plants for the Chemical Valley. In fact, companies looking to locate there approached Andy first, even though the lands they were eyeing for development were in nearby Moore Township (known today as St. Clair Township). It's no coincidence that the Chemical Valley was booming in the 1970s. Back then we had a mayor who could talk people into investing billions of dollars in our community.

Nor were those his only accomplishments. He had far too many to list them all here.

Even cynical reporters recognized his brilliance, affectionately dubbing him 'Action Andy.'

There are many leaders who get credit for things they had little or nothing to do with. Good things that simply happened on their watch.

But Brandt wasn't one of them. He went out and made things happen. We could use more leaders like him today.