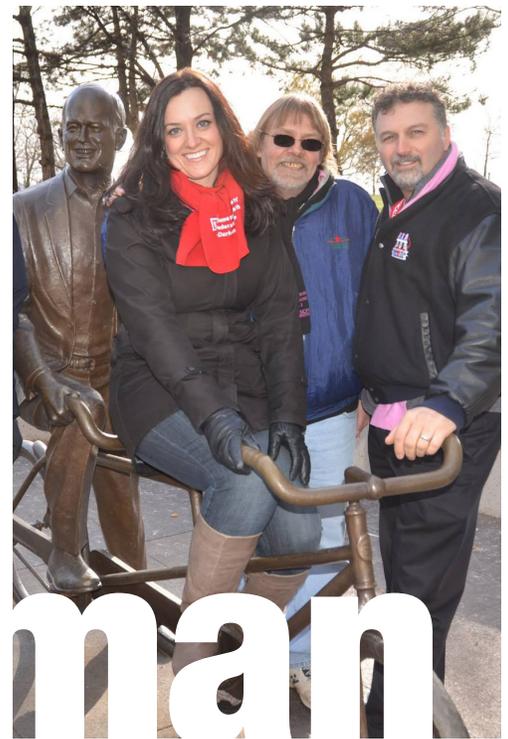


In Memoriam
Jim Freeman

— March 17, 1955 - April 4, 2016 —



Labour Activist & Community Builder



Jim Freeman

Lifelong labour activist, autoworker and Durham Region Labour Council President Jim Freeman finally lowered his union flag on Monday, April 4, when he passed away suddenly at home at age 61.

“Jimmy’s principled passion and hearty laugh will be missed at rallies, marches and picket lines across the province,” said Chris Buckley, OFL President and former President of Unifor/CAW Local 222. “Jimmy was a go-to guy for anything and everything political. He showed progressive leadership that gave incredible profile to Ontario’s labour councils as hubs for regional organizing. His passing leaves a big hole in our hearts and in our movement.”

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Chris Buckley, OFL President

Jim was known for his easy-going attitude, loudly coloured Hawaiian shirts, and his commitment to community organizing. He grew up in Oshawa, where family life revolved around the auto industry. Jim’s grandfather started at General Motors in 1934, his father worked there for 40 years, and Jim followed in their footsteps. Over 30 years, he was a member of the United Auto Workers, Canadian Auto Workers, and the newly formed Unifor. Even after he retired in 2013, he became active with the Local 222 retirees. The union was in his blood.

Jim became a principal member of his union flying squad, and he later headed up the Political Education Committee. During the height of the Mike Harris attacks on workers’ rights and social programs, Jim was seconded to help organize the Kingston Days of Action, where he headed up advance work for a rally that drew tens of thousands to the streets.

“Jim was a long-standing dedicated activist in our union. He would go to the wall to defend workers and demand change for social justice,” said Jerry Dias, Unifor President. “I always admired his forth right honesty, passion for politics, and active approach that helped make our union and the labour movement stronger.”

Jim is perhaps best known for his decade-long run as the President of the Durham Region Labour Council, which he used as a platform for giving provincial and national profile to the role of labour councils. Jim used every opportunity to pave the way for young activists.

Under Jim’s leadership, the Durham Region Labour Council became the first in Canada to create a Vice-President position for young workers and he later spearheaded an initiative to give every labour council an additional Ontario Federation of Labour convention credential that was dedicated for a young worker delegate. His strong leadership among Ontario’s labour councils got him elected to the Ontario Federation of Labour Executive Board in 2011 and he was elected to the Board of the Ontario Federation of Union Retirees in 2013.

“Jim’s mentorship from my earliest days as a young worker has earned him a special place

in my heart,” said Erin Harrison, CLC Ontario Regional Director. “He had a knack for looking into the eyes of young activists and seeing a potential we didn’t yet see in ourselves. It was a deeply felt commitment to growing the labour movement that never wavered.”

During his “personal” time, Jim sat on the Board of the Durham United Way and the Durham Region Unemployment Help Centre. He also served on the executive of the provincial and federal NDP riding associations in Oshawa and he was involved in too many NDP campaigns to count. However, the electoral campaign he was no-doubt most proud of was the 2014 breakthrough victory of rookie NDP MPP Jennifer French in a long-time Tory riding.

“Jim Freeman broadened our movement one personal connection at a time. He helped build a strong community of activists in Oshawa, by inspiring us to take care of each other, to work and to fight.”

Jennifer French, NDP MPP for Oshawa

“Jim Freeman broadened our movement one personal connection at a time. He helped build a strong community of activists in Oshawa, by inspiring us to take care of each other, to work and to fight,” said Jennifer French, NDP MPP for Oshawa. “He wanted to build a better world, and he made each of us better along the way. Though the ripples of this loss are being felt across the country, they can’t travel half as far as the reach of his impact.”

LET'S DEFEND
OUR RIGHTS
AT WORK



One of Jim's most important contributions to labour and social justice organizing, was the role he played in helping to create a labour-community movement called "We Are Oshawa." From its inception, Jim was always very clear that We Are Oshawa is quite pointedly not a coalition, but a horizontal, democratic membership organization whose political focus is determined by those members. It brought together a network of labour, students, community activists, environmentalists, retirees and youth to launch creative campaigns for social change.

Never intimidated by the changing times, Jim was an early adopter of social media and used Facebook and Twitter to grow a political movement outside of the traditional circle of union activists. However, his skill at adapting to new technology was defined by his aptitude for the "social" part of social media. Whether in person or online, Jim knew how to connect to people and make them feel like part of a broader movement. He frequently called on activists to make political events more fun, so that people feel positively about the movement and form the social bonds that keep them involved.

"Jim was the real deal – raw and unvarnished. He was a fearless activist who believed in the power of the labour movement but also understood that the full potential of

popular movements can only be leveraged when labour and the community were fused together in solidarity," said Patti Dalton, President of the London and District Labour Council. "Jim's work in pioneering the We Are Oshawa initiative really raised the bar for labour councils across the country and inspired us to follow the example he set."

"We could always count on Jim to challenge leadership with the tough questions that needed to be asked. He will be sadly missed, not only by me, but by everyone who had the pleasure of working alongside him."

Hassan Yussuff, CLC President

In 2012, Jim was recognized with the first ever Kathie Fowlie Award of Excellence for Community Building from the Labour Community Services of the Durham Region United Way. It was a testament to a lifetime dedicated to growing a movement.

Despite his affable and easy-going demeanor, Jim was stubbornly committed to his principles and it was a trait that sometimes gave him cause to rise at a convention microphone in opposition to his union or party leadership. However, it was precisely this

tenacity that earned him the respect of his political allies and opponents alike.

"Jim was a passionate labour council and local leader. Throughout his life, Jim was known for his commitment to labour and to the NDP. We could always count on Jim to challenge leadership with the tough questions that needed to be asked," said Hassan Yussuff, President, Canadian Labour Congress. "He will be sadly missed, not only by me, but by everyone who had the pleasure of working alongside him. This is a tragic loss for our movement."

Jim is survived by his beloved longtime spouse, Monique Hayes, and a movement of labour and community activists that often felt more like family than comrades and political allies.

The labour movement, joins the Oshawa community in mourning the loss of one of its most principled and straight-talking activists.

JOIN THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN CELEBRATING JIM'S LIFE

Sunday, April 17, 2016
Noon to 4:00 pm

Unifor Local 222 Office
1425 Phillip Murray Ave,
Oshawa, ON L1J 8L4

With love and solidarity from
Ontario's regional labour councils.



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We will miss you, Jimmy

