

Becksted, Robert (Bob) #529 *

Robert (Bob) Becksted

"If you truly love nature, you will find beauty everywhere."

– Vincent Van Gogh

The calm of the woods. A majestic mountainside. A lakeside retreat. These are places to get to know ones-self and build bonds with family, friends and neighbours. Such is the life of our father/friend/neighbour Robert (Bob) Becksted.

While Bob's career was dedicated to the built form, Bob also marvels at the sculptural aesthetic in nature – the intricate design of a single leaf, a barren tree, a snow drift, a rock face, or a crashing wave.

A man of integrity and wisdom, Bob's joie de vivre and love of his surroundings will be his legacies.

Bob Becksted was born in St. John's, Quebec in 1928 and raised in Montreal where he grew up with his parents Walter and Violet and his sister Norma. Bob first came to North Bay in 1945 when his father was transferred as official Signals Supervisor of the CPR, beginning a life-long association with the community. Bob attended North Bay Collegiate and Vocational Institute for his final year of high school where he was a star on the football team. It was then that he met the love of his life and his future bride, Shirley Marguerite Ethyl Willoughby, the daughter of Bryce (Doc) Willoughby and Mildred (Sally) of North Bay.

Following high school, Bob was accepted into the School of Architecture at U of T and moved to Toronto. Combining his love of aesthetics, history and mathematics, Bob obtained his degree and graduated in 1951. Bob and Shirley were married in North Bay in 1952, and raised two children, Karen and Scott.

Bob built his architecture practice in Toronto where his first noteworthy design was the award-winning Seaway Hotel on the west Toronto lakeshore, one of the first truly Modernist motor hotels in Canada, earning a 1955 Massey Silver Medal. The iconic Seaway Towers Motor Hotel, also by partners Elken and Becksted, was added on a neighbouring site in 1963. Perhaps one of his most satisfying projects was the preservation and restoration of the historic buildings at Upper Canada Village near Morrisburg where the Becksted ancestors originally settled from New England. One of his most complex and demanding projects was the design of the world-class Etobicoke Olympium, acclaimed as one of the best aquatic facilities in Canada.

Bob's strongly-held theory of design is that structures should relate to their surroundings. "The built form should complement the environment, not compete with it," is a favourite phrase and a guiding principle.

When Walter retired in 1963 Bob's parents built a cottage on Trout Lake which then became the first home that they owned. Violet named it Stoneclough. Bob and Shirley eventually purchased their own adjoining lot and cabin which they expanded and re-modelled in the late 1970's. In 1990 Bob renovated and expanded what was previously his parents' home, moving into his own beloved Stoneclough when he retired in 1992.

During retirement Bob has given back to the community through volunteer efforts with the North Bay Municipal Heritage Committee, identifying and protecting heritage properties, including the historic CPR station where his father had worked.