

# 'His spirit lives on': Father Les Costello statue back at the Mac



[Maija Hoggett](#)

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1 / 3 Wayne Bozzer, left, Paul Harrison, Mike Mulryan and Ed Pupich with the new Father Les Costello statue. | Maija Hoggett/TimminsToday



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This story was originally published on TimminsToday on April 24. We're sharing it again today for readers who may have missed it.

Les Costello was many things.

He was a Stanley Cup winner turned priest, he founded the Flying Fathers and delivered off-the-wall sermons.

One of the many ways his legacy lives on in the City of Timmins is through a bronze statue of the hockey legend at the iconic McIntyre Community Building.

When the piece was found broken last year, the effort to replace it extended well beyond the city limits and, fittingly, involves more than a few connections to the Toronto Maple Leafs.

This week, a new 36-inch bronze statue of Costello, with his arms in the air celebrating after scoring a goal, was unveiled by the Timmins Sports Hall of Fame at the Mac. It will be showcased in the display in the main entrance into the arena.

A team chock-full of Leafs alumni made the statue a reality decades ago.

In the early 2000s, the Flying Fathers were touring northeastern Ontario in support of the DARE program.

At one of the stops in the Tri-Town area the arena was packed for a touching game, recalled Paul Harrison, a former NHLer and OPP officer. At the game, Albert Dower was given his 20-year OPP career pin on the ice. Soon after, Dower died of cancer.

Kevin Murphy, the OPP sergeant who organized the game, talked to Harrison after.

"He was the person that came to me to say, 'We want to do something, what can you do? What do you think the Leafs would do? And can you help me to do it?'" said Harrison, who brought it to a Toronto Maple Leafs Alumni meeting and the association stepped up to pay for a statue.

Former Leafs player turned sculptor Gary Aldcorn was commissioned to create the statue, which was housed at the Cobalt arena.

After the arena closed, the statue eventually ended up in the hands of the Timmins Sports Hall of Fame.



*The Timmins Sports Hall of Fame put out a call for help last year to repair the statue of Father Les that was broken recently. Supplied photo*

Last year, the statue was broken and [Mike Mulryan wrote about it in his weekly \*TimminsToday\* column](#), which Harrison read.

The column made guesses at what the piece was made from and whether or not it could be fixed.

Knowing everything there is to know about the statue and its story, he reached out to the hall of fame crew.

The Northeastern Ontario OPP DARE board agreed to pay for the replacement.

## Fortuitous timing

A lot of stars had to align for the replacement to come to fruition.

Aldcorn was living in Toronto area when he created the original statue and has since moved to Lethbridge, Alberta.

"I'm an old hockey player ... so I was aware of Les Costello and his reputation and also the group of priests, the Flying Fathers, so I was very happy to do it," he said.

Fortuitously, Aldcorn's salesman in Toronto still had the mold, which Harrison picked up and shipped to Lethbridge.

"If we didn't have the mould I wouldn't have time to do it, it would take me a long time," he said.

The former left winger who played over 200 games in the took up sculpting about 40 years ago.

"It's a lot of fun, quite honestly. I enjoy the process immensely and ... anybody who creates, whether it's sculpting or woodwork it is, it's really gratifying. To create something that hasn't been there before is an enormous ego boost, quite honestly. So it's a lot of fun," he said.



*Former NHLer turned sculptor Gary Aldcorn with the bronze statue of Father Les Costello. Supplied photo*

Now 89, Aldcorn still sculpts about three hours a day.

His focus now is creating busts of hockey legends (he's also done golf legends) that he makes into tables.

"My goal in life is to keep making tables of legends until either I run out of legends or I stop being around," he said.

Once the new Costello statue was done, there was still a hurdle to overcome — getting it to Timmins.



The journey involves even more Maple Leafs connections.

Graham MacLachlan is a relative of J.P. Bickell, who was a majority owner, chair, president and director of the Leafs from 1924-51.

Bickell also owned the McIntyre mine and, in 1938, he built the McIntyre Community Building, which the mine maintained until the City of Timmins took it over in the '70s.

MacLachlan and his wife Anika live in Calgary and drove to Lethbridge to pick up the statue. Their son, Evan, works in Timmins and had a stressful 2,800-plus kilometre drive from Calgary transporting the well-cushioned artwork in his truck.

## 'He was a Northern boy'

Costello likely wouldn't have approved of all this effort for him.

Born in South Porcupine in 1928, he was on the Toronto Maple Leafs Stanley Cup-winning team in 1948 before leaving the NHL to become a priest. He was one of two players from the community on the Leafs that year, the other being Bill Barilko, who died in 1951 after scoring his infamous Cup-winning goal.

Costello was ordained in 1957 and served in South Porcupine, Kirkland Lake, Rouyn, Cobalt, Schumacher and Timmins.

In early 1960s, Costello helped found the Flying Fathers, a group of Catholic priests who played hockey to raise money for charity.

He established St. Martin de Porres at St. Alphonsus in Schumacher in 1979. The thrift shop lives on today at the former Nativity of our Lord Parish on Spruce Street North, where Costello also served as a parish priest. He died in 2002 a week after falling and hitting his head on the ice at a Flying Father's game.

The night before the unveiling of the new statue, the key players making it happen shared stories about Costello and the good ol' days on and off the ice.

The tales are all similar.

Costello was private and shied from the spotlight.

"He told the guy from the Toronto Star, you want to write a story, write it on one of these guys ... all you gotta put there is 'Father Les played some hockey, became a priest and now runs a really nice little parish in Schumacher and helps the less fortunate.' That's what he wanted if they were going to put a story," said Mulryan.

Ed Pupich, who describes himself as a good Croatian boy from Schumacher, remembers summers being about 10 years old when Costello was in the seminary and would come back to town to play ball in the summer. Pupich was the bat boy.

[Moose](#), Costello's brother, rented an apartment from Pupich's parents for 20-some years and they got to know the family. Pupich later worked with another brother, Murray, at Hockey Canada and played for the Flying Fathers.

He remembers Costello as being a people person.

"He made you feel very comfortable at all times ... he was an avid sportsman, his sermons were great, off-the-wall at times," laughed Pupich.

"No holds barred whether it was a wedding, a funeral," added Wayne Bozzer.

A champion of the underdog, Costello's legacy lives on through Saint Martin de Porres, the Rick Young Centre and countless other people whose lives he touched over the years.

"His spirit lives on in Northern Ontario with anybody he's preached to and anybody that spent a moment with him and heard of Les Costello's story. He was just a very kind-hearted, crusty kind of gold miner type of guy. He was a Northern boy and he wasn't pretentious. You knew where you stood with him. You knew very quickly if he liked you or not ... if he liked you, he'd tease ya, if he didn't like you, he'd ignore you," Harrison said.

At the OPP, Harrison was the face of the DARE program.

He credits the that 11-game tour in the early 2000s for the program's popularity in the region.

"I think that our DARE program and our youth owe him a huge debt of gratitude for planting the seed and giving us the resources to get operational. Without that Flying Fathers tour, we had nothing," said Harrison.



### ***About the Author: Maija Hoggett***

Maija Hoggett is an experienced journalist who covers Timmins and area  
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