

Citizen of the Year

Chamber of Commerce picks Tom Gardner

Tom Gardner, longtime hardware store owner and active member of many community groups, has been named the Bradford and district citizen of the year by the Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. Gardner, 74, will be honored Sunday, May 9 with a two hour reception at the Bradford Community Centre.

Mr. Gardner retired in 1973 after selling the hardware store he had operated for 56 years. He and his wife, Rita, now live in an apartment on Drury St. For many years they lived in the house at 24 Drury St.

Last Saturday, after learning he had been chosen as citizen of the year, Mr. Gardner reminisced about a few of the highlights of his active life.

Mr. Gardner served on the school board for 42 years, retiring in 1968 when the boards amalgamated and became county-wide. He also served a term on Bradford town council.

Tom said it was his objection to the existing public school which prompted him

to run for the board in 1926. "It was located just east of the present public school and must have been about 90 years old then. I objected to the toilets, all it had was outhouses. I made up my mind my children were going to have something better."

Mr. Gardner was born in Newmarket in 1902 and attended school there. In 1917, he came to Bradford with his father, H.F.S. Gardner. His father had retired from his trade as an iron molder, tried farming but been forced to quit because of ill health, then purchased the store in Bradford.

Originally the Gardner family lived on Simcoe St. across from what is now the Lathangue and Skwarchuk Funeral Home. The owner of the large house which now houses the funeral home died and the Gardners believed the place was willed to Wycliffe College in Toronto.

While in the city purchasing supplies for the hardware store, Tom and his father stopped in at the college and asked about the

house. They bought it for \$2,500. The parcel included a large barn.

"The house had four fireplaces and solid brick partitions," Mr. Gardner recalls. "It'll still be standing when many of the houses now being built have collapsed."

Eventually the Gardners tore down the barn and with the lumber built the house just south of the funeral home. Mr. Gardner's mother, Bertha lived there until her death last year at the age of 99.

Mr. Gardner married his wife, Rita in 1924. Mrs. Gardner's brother, Fred Cook, was a longtime member of the town council until his death last year.

"I was making \$15 a week when we got married and when we had our first child dad gave me a raise to \$20," he remembers.

"When we bought our first house it cost \$1,500 with \$300 down. Taxes were \$22 a year."

Tom and Rita have two children, Don and Jack. Don, a high school teacher, worked

with his father in the store for a number of years after Tom's father died in 1952. He returned to teaching and now lived in Simcoe. He has two boys, David and Jim.

Son Jack is a lawyer and he also has two children, Jane and Peter.

Mr. Gardner has been an active member of the United Church and for 35 years was superintendent of the Sunday School. Mrs. Gardner has taught a Sunday School class for over 50 years.

For 63 years he was a member of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. In 1929 he served as the district deputy grandmaster.

Mr. Gardner was a Lion for 27 years and in 1954, the year of Hurricane Hazel served as both the president of the Lions Club and head of the Bradford branch of the Red Cross.

"The night before Hurricane Hazel," he recalled, at a Lions meeting I asked for volunteers to collect for an organization. I didn't get any. The next night the whole gang

was out working along with the rest of the town. It just took an emergency to get them motivated.

"People from all over rallied to help the people in the Marsh. We had a tractor trailer load of underwear that had been rounded up all over the northland. We had enough pabulum to feed half the babies in Ontario and enough silk hosiery for all the women in the province.

"I remember going to the town hall one evening when they were serving supper. They were worried because they had no dessert. A truck arrived from Orangeville with 2-300 pies and that solved that," he laughed.

Now Tom spends much of his time entertaining the many young children in his apartment building. Each day he takes a group or two out for a walk.

"I've always enjoyed working with children. I've often thought I would have enjoyed being a probation officer and helping out children who were in trouble."



Tom Gardner