

NOMINATION FOR 2022 CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Milt Pedwell

While most people use retirement as an opportunity to relax and focus on themselves, Milt Pedwell was building a paddling organization in the City of Selkirk and surrounding



area that was connected to other paddlers in Manitoba, across the provinces, to United States and around the world.

In 1991 Milt Pedwell retired from working at the HudBay Minerals in Snow Lake, Manitoba where he worked for 35 years as an under-mine captain, rescuer, underground fire fighter and recruiter. When he retired he and his wife, Darlene, wanted to move to a new community and start a new adventure. They checked out a few communities and in the end they selected the City of Selkirk. Milt and Darlene found it to be a friendly community. Noting that even the City Mayor, Bud Oliver, at the time, told Milt and Darlene that “one of the best things about Selkirk was its friendly people”. Another important feature was that

there was a river with some beautiful adjoining waterways. This was especially important as Milt had a long history of paddling and skiing. In fact the first canoe race he organized in Snow Lake was in 1967. Milt was taught how to paddle by some of the finest Indigenous paddlers and was taught how to ski by the immigrants who came from Finland.

The City of Selkirk was very lucky when Milt and his wife Darlene, chose to move to Selkirk because he came with big plans! Once Milt was settled in his new home, he set up a booth in the Selkirk Mall to recruit people to form a canoeing group. The adventures began when three families signed up who were all relatively new at canoeing. They would take their canoes and meet together for a paddle in the Selkirk area (the Estuary, Cook’s Creek and the Red River). And once the snow came, Milt taught these families how to cross country ski.

Now the races Milt was used to were 30 plus kilometers for both paddling and skiing events! He even competed in a 10 day race in 1989. In Selkirk he was starting over again. As the number of participants increased, the club formally organized to become the Selkirk Community Paddling Club.

With Milt at the helm or should I say the stern (steering the club), SCKC developed into a competitive club, where a large number of members became coaches, National

officials, and families of all ages became competitive athletes in Olympic style canoes and kayaks, marathon canoeing and dragon boating.

As a result, Dave Anderson and Zane Clarke competed on Canoe Kayak Canada's (CKC) Flatwater *National Team* and Nick Humniski, made *Junior National Team*. Many other athletes, youth and master level, competed across Canada and in Europe.

The marathoners at the club became power houses on the waterways winning many competitions across the country and in United States. More recently, Milt competed with a club member in the 2017 marathon race in the Pas winning the Mixed Masters event. Milt was the oldest paddler and being well respected was called the "Godfather of Paddling."

In Dragon Boating, members competed in International Canoe Federation Dragon Boat races in Canada and Europe. SCKC was there when Dragon Boating first came to Winnipeg and SCKC members, including Milt, competed in the first dragon boat regatta.

The first club members started paddling in the Selkirk area and then found their first home at Colville Marina in East Selkirk and purchased two truck trailers to store their boats. In 1997, the club was invited by the City of Selkirk to move to the Selkirk Park. Milt, with some club members, scouted out the area to determine the best location for the club and chose the quiet area located on the Estuary, otherwise known as the slough, winter harbour or Purvis channel. This is an inlet from the Red River so it does not have a current and has limited boat traffic, making it a safe area to learn paddling. You can also enjoy the beauty of nature. There are osprey, blue herons, eagles, beavers, turtles and more!

Milt had a way encouraging people to join his paddling vision which resulted in members who eagerly used their skills and abilities to further develop the club and plan big events. While the first race Milt organized was a simple paddle on the Red River. The following year he organized the Highland Gathering Race that had prize money of \$1,000.00. Milt reached out to paddlers from different regions of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and United States, making his first regatta a huge success. Milt also organized SCKC's annual Cook's Creek Classic marathon race which also became an annual race. Both races continue today. And at the annual Provincial Cup races held in Selkirk, you would see Milt cheering on the young athletes.

In 2000, SCKC organized the Steel City Triathlon event in the Selkirk Park that included a run, bike ride and paddle (that could be paddled as a team or individually). It was a great success! In 2002, SCKC hosted the National Marathon Race in the Selkirk Park. This was a major event with competitors coming from across Canada and the US. Milt who was a key planner, was so proud of how well the events were run; no protests!

In 2003, the SCKC hosted the 2003 Western Canada Summer Games paddling event. Milt participated on SCKC's Western Canada Summer Games planning committee. At the event he was in charge of the transportation to and from the venue in the park using

a golf cart. He was the perfect person to greet paddlers, coaches and officials from the western provinces as he was able to quickly make people feel welcomed.

As a legacy for the games, SCKC was gifted with the funds to construct a beautiful boat house in time for the games! This prompted the club to change its name to the Selkirk Canoe Kayak Centre (SCKC) and create a new logo for the new club racing jersey. This was a major stepping stone for the club that Milt had developed and was so proud of.

While paddling was the main focus, Milt kept his team active in the winter with cross country skiing. Instruction started at the Selkirk Golf Course, then moved to a Saturday morning ski at Bird's Hill Park. Eventually Milt, along with Club members, cleared and groomed a ski trail in the Selkirk Park. Milt ensured everyone had ski equipment to use, the skis were waxed properly (he usually took care of that for all beginners) and ski lessons were organized.



Milt was and continues to be one of the best coaches in Manitoba with plenty of patience and skill to coach the young and the old. Milt is our most effective recruiter, inviting people to paddle in the summer or go for a cross country ski in the winter. One of his favorite groups are the children who attend SCKC's summer day camps and the evening youth group. He not only

teaches them the finer skills of canoeing and water safety but includes information on the wild life and plants in the area and of course they have some fun learning wild life calls.

With Milt's background in safety, he always has safety in the forefront of all his activities, whether it is coaching or organizing a regatta. For example, he always checked the paddler's skill level, safety equipment, and the weather and waterways condition. He also organized community information sessions from experts like Ron McDougall who provided life-saving and survival skills sessions to the community.



Within the last 10 years Milt started organizing “Historical Paddling Tours”. He ensured the safety of all paddlers, making sure beginners were paddling with experienced paddlers. The group would paddle to various sites of interest such as St. Peter, Dynevor Old Stone Church where they would learn about the history of Chief Peguis. Milt would arrange for experts in the area to provide the history. Once back in Selkirk everyone enjoyed lunch at a local restaurant. Milt started the Historical Tours when a history professor from the University of Manitoba approached Milt and wanted to go for a paddle to “experience the history.”

In 1999, the club created the Pedwell Award to recognize a club member who went above and beyond in showing “Outstanding Dedication” to club. The first year it was awarded to Milt to thank him for his dedication. The award continues to be awarded to SCKC’s most dedicated members. Last year the club celebrated its 30th anniversary and wanted to honour Milt. A framed picture of him will be displayed in the boat house to honour his 30 years of Outstanding Dedication. Milt, at the age of 86 continues to actively participate on SCKC’s Board of Directors, teach children and adults canoeing skills and ensure everyone has the opportunity to see the brighter side of life.



In summary, through paddling and cross-country skiing Milt Pedwell:

1. Taught canoeing which brings with it a respect and enjoyment for the waterways, weather and nature.
2. Provided opportunities through sport, for youth to develop self-discipline, self-confidence, life-skills, and enjoy the outdoors.
3. Promoted a family approach to the sport that encouraged both recreational and competitive sport. The entire family was paddling – young, senior, all abilities! Although right from the start Milt injected the competitive spirit which took off. Athletes, young and old, competed around the world, making the City of Selkirk proud.
4. Tapped into the skills and abilities of club members who together successfully planned, organized and coordinated very successful regattas in sprint, marathon and dragon boating.
5. Promoted tourism in the City of Selkirk, RM of St. Andrews and RM of St. Clements. People from across Canada and the US participated in the many paddling events held in the area.

6. Showcased the beauty of the waterways in City of Selkirk and surrounding areas. Who would think the old slough would become the Estuary! A place where nature can be enjoyed.
7. Shared the history of the City of Selkirk and surrounding areas through the Historical Tours.
8. Connected people from all walks of life and quietly ensured everyone had the opportunity to experience the fun of paddling. Milt also connected with various groups and organizations such as the Highland Gathering and the Boy Scouts.

Milt is a wonderful person who truly makes the City of Selkirk and surrounding areas a better place to live in. He brought paddling to the area in a big way! Milt was the sport developer at the front end and continues today, thirty-one years later, *all on a volunteer basis!*