

2023 Barrie Arts Award - City of Barrie

Cultural Changemaker - Bruce Owen

Born on May 24, 1931, Bruce Owen was a steadfast leader in the Barrie Arts community throughout his adult life. He was an accomplished singer, known for singing in almost every Christian church in Barrie, and despite being Anglican, served as a soloist for the papal choir when the Pope came to the area in the 1980's. He had a devoted local following, producing four popular LPs of his singing that can be found in households across Barrie.

Bruce's contributions to the Barrie arts sector are numerous and span generations. In 1959, he took on the role of Chief organizer for [Barrie Concerts](#), a position he held until 2022. In the early 1970's he was a member of the leadership team that created Kempenfest, Barrie's biggest arts-focused event to date, and in 1990, he founded the Georgian Music Series, serving as Chief organizer of concerts until 2022. From 2003 to 2014, Bruce ran the Colours of Music festival which saw 50 concerts performed over ten days, including some in Barrie schools. In 2000, he founded yet another music series, Music at St. Andrew's, organizing monthly piano and organ chamber music concerts until 2022.

During his time organizing concert series and festivals, Bruce gave back to his community in other ways as well. He organized the funding to procure two \$180,000 Shigeru-Kawai pianos which are currently located at Hi-Way Pentecostal and Bethel Community Church. As a result, pianists are much easier to persuade to perform in Barrie as they have the opportunity to use concert grade professional instruments.

Bruce also hosted an interview-style TV show on CKVR, a weekly local radio show, and wrote a weekly column for the Barrie Examiner, often discussing music and the arts on each platform.

In addition to his engagement in the arts scene, Bruce also served as a leader in the community – president of the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis Club, and Mental Health Association, as well as alderman, and Member of Provincial Parliament.

Bruce practiced law in Barrie for 63 years in many areas including in the field of wills, powers of attorney and estates and real estate law and was a small claims court Judge for many years. He was part of the leadership that brought Barrie Centennial Park, the current RVH building and MRI. He also helped bring Honda to Alliston and legislation to ban smoking in the Ontario workplace. Bruce was the recipient of the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award and the Province of Ontario's June Callwood Leadership Award.

Bruce passed away on February 6, 2022, leaving a lasting mark on Barrie's arts scene and a legacy of volunteerism across Canada.

About the Cultural Changemaker Award

This special award signifies an individual's efforts to make change within Barrie's arts community and acknowledges their impact on the cultural landscape. It is a discretionary award only given to an individual who is highly notable for their lifetime contribution to Barrie's arts community.