

Former owner and publisher of the Shelburne Free Press passes away



Written By **Sam Odrowski**

A community-focused woman who impacted countless lives in the region recently passed away.

Pamela Anne Claridge, who led a life dedicated to her passion for music and enhancing the community, passed away at Headwaters Health Care Centre at the age of 80 on May 9.

She is survived by her four grandchildren, three children and husband Tom Claridge.

As a trained vocalist and soloist, she performed with countless choirs throughout her life and did many solo performances in her early years.

?In the later years, it was more about piano and organ ? teaching people piano and accompanying choirs and other singers,? said her son Alan Claridge.

?She did a lot of outreach through the church to seniors homes, and that sort of thing. A lot of times it had to do with music, playing songs during services.?

Over the years, Pam has played for countless funerals with Dods and McNair. She was an organist and choirmaster at St. Paul's

Anglican Church in Shelburne and later at St. Mark's Church in Orangeville. For over 40 years she organized music programs in senior homes.

Pam was still accompanying devotionals in Montgomery Village Retirement Home up until two weeks before she passed.

?Her passion for music was carried through her work in the community. She was involved with the Rotary [Club of Orangeville Highlands] for a long time. She was just somebody that gave back to the community.?

Alan added, ?I always appreciated that about her and have tried to do what I could in the community myself because of her.?

Pam was involved with a local school breakfast program for a number of years.

?I know that was really important to her,? Alan said. ?She just couldn't stand the fact that there were kids starting off their day without food.?

When it comes to community newspapers in the region, the Claridge name is well-known.

Tom and Pam Claridge founded the Orangeville Citizen and took ownership of the then Shelburne Free Press and Economist in the early 70s. They also owned the Grand Valley Star-Vidette and Caledon Citizen.

After a career as a professional singer in Toronto, Pam turned her focus to the family-owned community newspaper business. But music was never left behind.

?She simultaneously had the title of publisher and was a music teacher that taught both piano and voice,? said Tom.

Pam's role at the Orangeville Citizen changed over the years, but she was primarily focused on publishing and the business side of things, while Tom focused on taking photos, editing, and writing. During the early days of the newspaper, she helped put pages together, wrote articles, and provided guidance to reporters.

Alan said as with most entrepreneurial ventures, both Pam and Tom had to wear many hats when getting the paper off the ground.

?They had to be responsible for a lot of things for a lot of years, and I learned everything that I needed to know about how to run a newspaper from mom. Dad was more involved in the writing and editing, and I learned that from him,? said Alan, who worked for decades in various roles at the Claridge-owned newspapers.

?While it was maybe not her life's ambition to be a newspaper publisher, I think that it allowed mom to be in the community in a really constructive way, and get things accomplished that she wanted to see accomplished for the town and Dufferin.?

Pam's focus in the community was around music, outreach and publishing quality newspapers to keep residents informed

?Getting what was happening in the community out to the community was important to her because she understood that if people wanted to be active in the community, they had to be informed about it,? Alan explained.

Tom's grandfather purchased both the Shelburne Economist and Shelburne Free Press before merging them in 1928, just before the stock market crash in October of 1929 that triggered the Great Depression.

Pam and Tom took ownership of the Shelburne paper at the start of 1972, but with the Orangeville Banner taking up what little advertising there was in the community, he came up with the idea for Orangeville Citizen.

?We determined the only way of saving the Shelburne paper was to compete with the Banner, so I opened the Orangeville Citizen in

September '74. We moved from our lovely little home in Etobicoke to Orangeville in February of '75, Tom recalled.

I never thought 50 years later we would be the only game in town.

Tom met Pam when covering the legislature for the Canadian Press in Victoria, B.C. While living there he came across the Victoria Choral Society.

I showed up for a practice, and the beautiful young lady who was the soprano soloist, I happened to bump into her, Tom said. She happened to persuade me to switch churches. I'd been raised in the United Church she was Anglican.

We became engaged about a couple of months later and we were married in August '65.

Pam achieved many significant accomplishments throughout her life. She was a founding member and president of the Orangeville Concert Association and a director, as well as chorister, in many productions for the Orangeville Music Theatre.

Pam also chaired the steering committee to establish Theatre Orangeville back in 1994.

She was recognized as Woman of the Year by Family Transition Place in 1995 and installed into the Order of Niagara for her contributions to Shelburne's St. Paul's in 2000.

A funeral service for Pam Claridge will be held at St. Mark's Anglican Church (5 First Ave.) on Friday, May 17, at 2 p.m. Visitation begins at 1 p.m.

Memorial donations to the Orangeville Food Bank or St. Mark's Anglican Church are appreciated by the family.