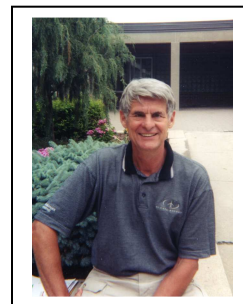


# Doug Letson



In an age of competition and consumerism, Douglas Letson lives a radical truth – that his neighbour’s well-being is as important as his own. This passionate dedication to the community has meant many hours of work without pay.

However, for Letson his legacy of volunteerism has been a joy. “To be honest,” he said once “the greatest personal satisfaction I have gotten out of my community involvement is the friends I have made along the way.”

In his professional career, Letson was notable as the first lay president of St. Jerome’s University. For almost thirty years, he served the small Roman Catholic university, first as the chairman of the English department then as assistant dean. He served as vice-president before his appointment as president for ten years beginning in 1989.

Near his retirement in 2005, Letson became involved with the Walter Bean Grand River Community Trails Foundation. As chairman of the group that proposed the Grand River trail, Letson was praised for his vision and leadership in raising millions of dollars.

Letson, who has hiked trails in thirty-five different countries, felt Waterloo Region could enhance the quality of life for everyone by making its majestic river accessible in the tradition of European cities. The Grand River is home to bald eagles, cormorants, fox and deer. “A lot of it is untouched. It’s been forgotten,” Letson said once.

The late Walter Bean, a local businessman and philanthropist, had the idea for the trail and helped to establish the original trail foundation in 1996.

“Walter Bean had a wonderful vision for the trail, but Doug Letson made it happen by providing inspirational leadership . . . He has managed all the details and has brought together a great team of volunteers to help make the trail a reality.”

Letson, who was born and raised in Kitchener, has a great loyalty to the area. He studied at St. Jerome’s University, before receiving his M.A. from McMaster University and his PhD from the University of Toronto before returning to St. Jerome’s to teach English.

In addition to his scholarly articles, Letson co-authored several books with his colleague Michael Higgins. They include: *Power and Peril: The Catholic Church at the Crossroads* (2002); *Soundings: Conversations about Catholicism* (2000) and *The Jesuit Mystique* (1995.) In 2001, he wrote *Sex and Marriage in the Catholic Tradition: An Historical Overview*.

In 2005, the St. Jerome’s community centre was named in his honour, and at his retirement ceremony, Waterloo MPP Elizabeth Witmer called him, “a man of integrity,

compassion, conviction: a very passionate advocate for education and the students here.” That year he also received Waterloo’s most prestigious civic honour – The Waterloo Award. He has been the recipient of the Walter Bean Award and the Volunteer of the Year Award from the Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation.

Despite his many hours of volunteer work, Letson continues to focus on the ways he has been blessed. “Life is a community experience, a social give and take,” he said during a speech. “And I am grateful for what you have given me.”

*Photo courtesy of St. Jerome’s University Archives*