



Much of CAMA's success over the past 50 years can be attributed to the members that have helped build the association from the very beginning.

As part of the #CAMA50 project, we will be publishing feature profiles of people who have made a lasting impression over the years.

Our first profiled member will be former CAMA Board Member John Ernest "Jack" Willis.

While we do not have much information in the CAMA Archives about Jack Willis, he is still the only person to have an Award of Excellence named in his honour.

Jack was born in Manitou, Manitoba, and spent his life dedicated to community and public service. He is perhaps best known for his involvement in the Metro Corporation of Greater Winnipeg (METRO) from its inception in 1960. He served in a variety of functions, including Chairman from 1967-1971, at which time he was involved with the first Tri-Level Conference of elected officials. It was at this event that the first discussions around the Canadian Association for Municipal Administrators are believed to have taken place.

Mr. Willis was an active CAMA member from the beginning, and even served as executive secretary along the way. His contributions and involvement lasted into the 1990, well into his 70s. The Willis Award for Innovation is awarded annually in his name. Jack also served in a variety of capacities with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities through his work with METRO.

Those who remember Jack speak of him fondly. They talk about a man dedicated to the betterment of community and was involved with a number of service organizations even as he enjoyed a full professional career in business and sales.

One person we talked to spoke of a man with many great ideas and who was an agent of change; someone who encouraged innovation and fostered new ways of thinking. His obituary cited that "he was greatly respected by all who knew him" and "a man of integrity and honour". It seems only fitting that we now pay tribute to Jack Willis through an award that encapsulates the spirit of innovation and recognizes the best and most admirable across the country.

Jack Willis passed away in 2002 in Victoria, B.C., where he moved post-retirement in 1991. In addition to his professional and community endeavours, he also was a dedicated family man to wife Laura, and three daughters.

Sources:

https://passages.winnipegfreepress.com/passage-details/id-68851/John_Willis

http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/people/willis_je.shtml

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