

Walter Bean

Walter Bean's legacy winds its way through Waterloo Region on the banks of the Grand River. The Walter Bean Grand River Trail was his dream for this community. Bean wanted residents to experience the beauty of the bald eagles, cormorants and limestone cliffs that were just minutes from the busy downtown streets where he grew up peddling newspapers.



As the son of newspaper publisher David Bean, Walter was awakened early on November 11, 1918 to sell Berlin's *Daily Telegraph* announcing the armistice. While he became well-known as the son of a prominent businessman and politician in Waterloo, Walter Bean carved out a legacy that is distinct. In fact, it seems as if the young Bean would excel at everything he pursued.

"He's my idol, my role model really. He was an athlete, he was a soldier, he was Kitchener-Waterloo's only general, a brigadier general in the Second World War," said Owen Lackenbauer, a former colleague.

Bean's reputation as an athlete would emerge at Kitchener-Waterloo Collegiate and Vocational School where he played defense on the school hockey team and was described in 1925 as a very fine hockeyist. His "rushing was also the result of a great deal of favorable comment." Later, when he attended the University of Toronto he played junior hockey, and in 1929 was selected for the Canadian All-Star Football Team.

After graduating in 1930, Bean joined the Waterloo Trust and Savings Company, as a \$1,000-a-year savings ledger keeper. He became treasurer in 1934, general manager in 1957 and president and general manager in 1964, a position he held when the company merged with Canada Trust in 1968. He was a director and member of the executive committee when he retired in 1973.

His business achievements were matched in his military career. He became an officer of the Scots Fusiliers militia regiment in 1930, and then volunteered to go overseas with the Highland Light Infantry of Canada where he rose to the rank of brigadier general – the highest rank attained by any Kitchener-Waterloo soldier during the war. Near the end of the war, Bean was named chief administrative officer of Canadian forces in the Pacific, and earned the honour of Commander of the British Empire.

The year he retired, Bean was named K-W Citizen of the Year. A few years later, newspaper columnist Henry Koch would write, "Few people in K-W have worked so tirelessly for the community good."

In his retirement, Bean continued his work for those less fortunate when he helped nurture the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation into an endowment fund for local charities that today has almost \$40 million in permanent assets. Bean believed that, "Service to your community is the rent you pay for living there."

“We could do a lot more for the community if we had a lot more money,” Bean said. “The foundation is filling a very important community need.” One of the projects in the early years was a stove for the St. John’s Soup Kitchen and a vehicle used in home repairs for the needy.

The peaceful winding Walter Bean Grand River Trail that is largely hidden from the bustle of the region is perhaps the most fitting legacy for a man who was once described as “quietly elegant” and “modest and unassuming.”

Photo courtesy of the Kitchener-Waterloo Record Photographic Negative Collection, University of Waterloo Library.