



Item
Meeting.....2010 June 14

COUNCIL REPORT

TO: MEMBERS OF COUNCIL **DATE:** 2010 May 19

FROM: MAYOR DEREK R. CORRIGAN

**SUBJECT: HONOURING MICHAEL J. FOX
FREEMAN OF THE MUNICIPALITY**

CLERK'S FILE: 01450-01

PURPOSE: The purpose of this report is to announce that Michael J. Fox was awarded Freedom of the Municipality on Saturday, June 04, 2010

RECOMMENDATION:

1. **THAT** this report be received for information.

REPORT

Burnaby City Council, at the Closed Council meeting held on 2010 May 03 unanimously voted to present Michael J. Fox with the most prestigious award a British Columbia Council may offer: Freedom of the Municipality. The presentation took place on Saturday, June 4th at the annual Michael J. Fox Theatre Golf Tournament and Gala.

BACKGROUND

Michael J. Fox moved to Burnaby in the early 1970's when his family relocated to B. C. following his Father's retirement from the Canadian Armed Forces. While his name at birth was Michael Andrew Fox, he chose Michael "J" as his professional name when he moved to Los Angeles to pursue a full time acting career. While it is reported he chose the "J" in honour of actor Michael J. Pollard, it is also reported he said he didn't want fan magazines to ever choose the headline Michael, A Fox!

Michael's rise to fame as a celebrated and successful actor began early in life. Encouraged by his teacher Ross Jones, at then Edmonds Junior High, he successfully auditioned for the role of Jamie in the television program "Leo and Me". Going to school during the day and working in theatre or other shows at night, he moved on to Senior Secondary at Burnaby Central, but decided soon after that acting would be his life's vocation. He left home at 18 to move to Los Angeles and pursue a growing acting career. However life in the big city was not as easy as it seemed. It wasn't until he had sold every stick of furniture in his apartment in order to pay his rent and eat, that he finally received his big break; the role of Alex P. Keaton in Family Ties.

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From there Michael has forged an extremely successful career as an actor, writer, director and producer starring in blockbuster movies such as the Back to the Future trilogy; long running television programs such as Family Ties and Spin City, and guest starring in recurring roles in a variety of television shows including most recently, Boston Legal and Rescue Me; winning 5 Emmys, 4 Golden Globes, 2 Screen Actor's Guild Awards, the People's Choice Award, a Grammy in 2010 and many others, far too numerous to mention.

SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY

While fame and fortune have the power to change some people, Michael has always been a down to earth person with a strong sense of social responsibility. Evidence of Michael's commitment to Burnaby can be seen through a variety of benefits we enjoy because of his desire to "give back" to the Community.

The Michael J. Fox Theatre opened in 1993 as part of Burnaby South Secondary School. The theatre plays an important role in the life of the Burnaby community, hosting a steady schedule of multicultural performances, dance, theatre, music and other community events helping to make it one of the busiest theatre venues in the lower mainland.

In November 1995 the theatre was officially named after Michael J. Fox, in recognition of his achievements in the arts and commitment to the community. Since that time Michael and his family have demonstrated their commitment to the Theatre, giving generous support both in time and funding to ensure the Theatre's long term viability.

The Michael J. Fox Theatre Society provides a post secondary scholarship program for students pursuing education in an arts discipline. Initial funding for these scholarships, part of a ten year program, was provided by Michael J. Fox. In 2005 a total of \$100,000 had been granted to more than 35 students attending schools in Burnaby School District. Another 12 winners were awarded scholarships through 2006 to 2008.

The Michael J. Fox Annual Golf Tournament is a very popular event and is the main source of fund raising for the MJF Theatre. Michael and his family regularly attend this event to promote and support the theatre. In 2009 Michael paid \$5,000 to the charity auction for the privilege of renaming a street in Burnaby. Funds from the auction also go towards theatre and scholarship programs.

During the 2010 golf tournament the formerly named Riverway Place, located in front of Riverway Golf Course where the tournament is held, was renamed *Bill Fox Way*, after Michael's late father.

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BEYOND THE COMMUNITY

Michael is a self described “incurable optimist”, and that optimism would be put to the test in 1991 when he was diagnosed with young onset Parkinson’s Disease. A committed family man, with wife Tracey and his four children, Michael has learned to meet this life challenge with the same tenacity, energy, humour and optimism he has applied throughout his life.

Creating the Michael J. Fox Foundation “dedicated to finding a cure for Parkinson’s” Michael moved from Actor to Activist, raising awareness, raising funds and while perhaps not by design, becoming a role model for how to move forward and build a happy and fulfilling life no matter the challenges. To date the MJF Foundation has raised \$179 million and of that 84% goes directly to research programs.

Throughout this journey Michael has never lost his sense of humour or his curiosity for what comes next. That curiosity, coupled with his sense of humour and naturally generous nature have driven him in new directions, stating in his new book: *Always Looking Up, The Adventures of an Incurable Optimist*, ‘work, politics, faith and family are the struts of my existence’. He is fearless, learning that “you just take it as it comes” with every day an unpredictable opportunity for a new experience.

His latest project is an empirical examination of optimism the world over; what is it, what does it look like, why are some people perpetually optimistic regardless of their experiences? He examines these questions and more in a television special also entitled “*Michael J. Fox, Adventures of an Incurable Optimist*”.

He is compassionate, kind and understanding, answering the wishes of children through the Kids Wish Network; he works tirelessly, travelling the world over to raise funds and promote awareness for research into a cure for Parkinson’s; he is dedicated to his family and has said his greatest gift from Parkinson’s is the time he has had with his children.

This is not to say that it has been an easy road, nor one in which everything has easily fallen into place. Michael has experienced loss, denial, fear, anxiety and pain. What is inspiring about Michael and what has set him apart from most people in similar situations, is that unfailing optimism; that determination to meet each challenge with humour and hope, finding ways to experience happiness in each day. He has found a positive channel for his pain, using the creativity he once expressed on screen to launch projects for the betterment of people the world over.

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CONCLUSION

Burnaby is proud to be considered Michael's "hometown", the host City for his annual charity golf tournament, and home to the Michael J Fox Theatre. In recognition of Michael's contributions to Burnaby and our citizens, his creativity and success both in the theatre and in life, City Council is pleased to grant Michael J. Fox Freedom of the Municipality.

Respectfully submitted,


Derek R. Corrigan,
MAYOR