



Brian Iler

CHFT Honorary Lifetime Member

Brian Iler was an articling student with progressive Toronto lawyer, Paul Copeland, in 1973 when the workers at Artistic Woodwork Co. staged a four-month strike, fighting for the rights of immigrant workers to organize, the use of undercover strike breakers, and the role of the police. Young, politicized people from across the city bussed to the strike site in North York to support the picketers. Copeland took Brian and it was on the line where he met Jon Harstone, setting him on his career path.

Brian began practising law in 1974 in the early days of co-op housing in Toronto and soon forged a relationship with the developing housing co-op movement through that connection to Harstone. Jon was one of a group of 20-somethings who boldly applied for and received CMHC funds to purchase 31-33 Melbourne to comprise part of Parkdale's newly formed Dufferin Grove Housing Co-op. It was a different time, one when CMHC took risks on young people who had good ideas. 31-33 Melbourne was Brian Iler's first of many real estate deals. His client, the founding Dufferin Grove board, included four of CHFT's Honorary Lifetime Members: Mark Goldblatt and Noreen Dunphy, Penelope Winter, and Harstone.

By the early 80s, Brian had formed a legal partnership with Charles Campbell, a progressive litigator, and their firm, Iler Campbell LLP, developed a niche serving a wide range of co-ops, including many housing co-ops across the GTA and beyond. Iler and Campbell shared a desire for a values-driven for-profit firm focused on providing non-profits, charities, and co-ops with quality, practical legal advice and important leadership and advocacy for the sector. Iler has worked to expand the range of housing options available through his work with non-profit condo developer, Options for Homes.

Brian provided legal advice for many years to St. Clare's Housing, one of Canada's largest private non-profit developers of new supportive and affordable housing built during the last 20 years. Iler's impact on the broader co-op movement has also been significant – he's developed close ties to the Ontario Co-operative Association, counts many business co-ops among his clients, and has been consulted many times by the government on changes to provincial co-op legislation.

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Although Iler Campbell LLP has never been CHFT's full-time legal counsel, Brian applied his charity law know-how to incorporate and then achieve charitable status for CHFT's Charitable Fund, the part of CHFT that awards its annual Diversity Scholarship. Iler Campbell has been a long-time financial supporter of the scholarships and Brian himself could be counted on for many years to bid on the annual painting auction conducted at the scholarship awards night.

Iler continues to practise law, despite retiring from his role as a partner in Iler Campbell LLP. The firm is his proudest legal accomplishment, acknowledging he couldn't have made such a mark and served so many great organizations if he'd been on his own. As just one of a handful of firms in southern Ontario experienced in housing co-op work, Brian has created a training ground for many who work in housing.

When asked about the most important co-operative principle, Brian Iler was quick to reply: "one member, one vote." For him, it's fundamental to ensuring it's not just the voices of the wealthy that are heard. Those are principles he's applied to volunteerism too. Despite being nearly 78, Brian Iler remains extraordinarily active in community work. His opposition to the Island Airport expansion solidified his role as a public figure. He has since gone on to establish long-time west-end music venue, Hugh's Room Life, as a charitable non-profit and found a way to buy a home for it in the east end, all while a pandemic was slowing nearly everyone else down. His latest fight is to preserve Ontario Place as public space, through his role on the legal committee for Ontario Place for All. You'd never know he claims to have been a shy man 50 years ago!

When Brian is not working or volunteering, he spends time in Toronto and on his well-named sailboat, "Indefatigable." with his partner, Mary, and sometimes, his three grown children and granddaughter.

Among his many honours, Brian Iler received the 2016 AMS/John Hodgson Award of Excellence in Charity and Not-For-Profit Law by the Ontario Bar Association Charity and Not-For-Profit Law Section. In his acceptance speech, he referred to himself as "an unrepentant 68er - hopeful, not without reason, that with collective and sustained community initiatives, the world can be made a better place." We think he's doing his part towards that goal. For that, we name him CHFT's 2023 Honorary Lifetime Member.

Congratulations Brian!

