

SPECIAL NOTICE

On November 24, 2013, “**Oliphant’s Academy of Physical Culture**” now known as “**Oliphant’s Gym**” **will be celebrating “100 Years Anniversary”**. The celebration will be held at 3pm at Ferro Bar & Café located at 769 St. Clair Ave. West at Arlington Ave. Phone No. (416) 654-9119. Tickets are \$65

WILLIAM OLIPHANT – BACKGROUND

William Oliphant Sr. was born in 1893 in Cupar-Flef outside of Dundee, Scotland. He immigrated with his wife and first son to Toronto, Canada in 1913.

Interested in physical fitness since boyhood, he ignored his training as a plumber and steam fitter and instead opened up a gym out of the basement of St. Andrews Church located downtown Toronto where William Sr. may have been the superintendent of the church.

In 1922, the gym moved to 648 Bloor Street west of Bathurst where it became a landmark for 53 Years. In 1975, the gym moved to Weston Road on the second floor of a multi storey industrial building and in 1980 the gym moved to 501 Dupont Street just west of Bathurst Street on the second floor above a transmission shop where today it still remains open after 100-years in business.

William (Buster) Oliphant Jr. was born in Toronto on August 27, 1914. At the age of 18 in 1932, Buster started instructing weight lifting part-time. Back in the thirties some of the most dedicated customers who came to the gym were ladies. Buster’s sister, Jessie was one of those ladies that took an interest in physical fitness and instructed weight lifting full-time from 1940 – 1945 while Buster was in the Army. After the war, Buster returned to Toronto and studied physiotherapy for two years. In 1947, his father passed away after finally being beaten by his injuries from the earlier war.

These two generations have run the gym with total commitment to physical health, using weight routines they have refined over decades. What William Sr. developed, Buster refined applying his own philosophy to the discipline of body building and Buster would say, “Weights are the best pill in the world”.

Over the years their knowledge attracted the professional athletes from the [Toronto Maple Leafs](#) like, Jimmy Fowler, Gus Bodnar, Ron Ellis, Hugh Bolton, Bobby Baun, Brit Selby, Cal “Pearly” Gardner and [NHL Hall of Fame players](#) like Clarence “Hap” Day, Reginald “Red” Horner, George “Chief” Armstrong, Ted “Teeder” Kennedy, Tim Horton and Darryl Sittler. Mike Gillis of the Colorado Rockies and Pat Graham of the Pittsburgh Penguins also trained there.

A similar list of Canadian Football League players who worked out at the gym, included Luster Aldridge, Semons Shatto and of course the list is somewhat misleading because gyms clientele also included everyday people. [For men of all ages, Oliphant’s gym became the haven away from the pressures of the busy world.](#)

Oliphant's gym was open on Monday, Wednesday and Friday from 9:30 am to 9:30 pm for the regular clientele. As a licensed physiotherapist, Buster worked with children with physical and mentally difficulties on his off days and weekends. In the early sixties, Ralph Fisher brought his son, Jeff, to the gym for help. Jeff had coordination problems that medical specialists had said could not be helped and would only get worse. Buster set up a series of special exercises that over the years turned Jeff into a normal functioning individual. As a result, Buster put together a comprehensive and detailed booklet on the methods used for Jeff and was asked to present this to various physiotherapy bodies in Canada and the U.S.A. Buster spent a lot of time giving special exercises to other children with special needs at the Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.

Oliphant's Academy of Physical Culture was a unique establishment. There were no plush carpets, no sauna baths and swimming pools and there was only one shower with line ups. Unlike other gyms, there were no annual membership fees, you paid \$2 for a work out and towels were extra if you showered and if you didn't come to work out, you didn't pay. Bus was a unique individual. No one else could bring together such a diverse group of individuals from every walk of life, while creating an atmosphere of complete equality and loyalty and loyalty to the gym and each other. In the gym you could see a judge helping spot and ex-con on the bench press, a doctor asking Bus for advice on an exercise for his bursitis because he was tired of taking cortisone shorts or a multi-millionaire business man advising a business beginner on the pitfalls of starting your own business. Bus and the gym were the "equalizers". We were all treated the same and he remembered every time we missed a work out. Miss one and Bus would make you feel guilty in his own inimitable way. Many friendships developed through the gym lasting to this day.

Obviously, the secret to the gym was Buster Oliphant himself. Everyone would call Buster – Bus. His wife Shirley was a charming lady and would make tea for Bus and anyone else. The barbells that were used in the gym have been around for at least 100 years. Buster was one of a kind who had good humor and his kindness to everyone was his biggest assets of the gym. Buster would always joke, "we don't discriminate, we just don't allow any blacks, Italians, Spanish or Portuguese people to work out here" – when in fact there were people working out there from all walks of life. Buster was referred to as "the coach" who would make sure he learned a few x-rated words in every language. He would than use them, kiddingly, on unsuspecting patrons from the appropriate ethnic community—usually as they were struggling with their last bench press repetition. When ever you screwed up on an exercise...Buster would say something like "you must be Italian".

There were little things we knew and loved about Bus: his gym clock on the wall was always 20 minutes fast for the entire time has been around and his playfully offering to give anyone who walked on the clean white linen covered mats a "haircut" and most remarkably, remembering the first name of everyone who came in the gym.

Bus never worried much about making a large amount of money. There were no up-front membership fees. If you came and worked out you paid for the day. If you missed a day there was no charge.

In 1975, after decades of commitment to the physical health and well being of others, Bus had his first heart attack. Three years later, Bus checked himself into the intensive care floor of Toronto Mount Sinai Hospital. His doctors told him his second heart attack should have killed him. What happened at the gym in the ensuing months after each heart attack was a tribute to both of the Oliphant's years of dedication to others. The gym didn't falter for a day. Experienced regulars who knew the routines would start new customers. Others contributed their time and effort to running the gym.

On May 14, 1985 there was the Buster Oliphant Reunion at the Underground Railway Restaurant. [The Oliphant reunion was carefully planned and organized in a way acceptable to Bus, who only agreed to the reunion on the condition that it would be a non-profit event and that everyone, could afford it or not, would be able to come.](#) John Henry Jackson, owner of the restaurant, former member of the gym and old footballer closed the restaurant for the day to accommodate the event – which was attended by over 300 old and new gym members, was a great success. However, in spite of the promise and all the planning, the reunion ended up with a cash surplus. The cash surplus was given to Bus as a way of giving some recognition to the influence Bus and the gym had on so many of our lives.

In 1990 a member of the gym, Michael Copeman, produced a movie "[Down and Drive It](#)" – it is an inspirational documentary portrait of 75 years old weight trainer, Buster Oliphant, and one of Canada's oldest gyms. Michael states, "They don't make gyms like this anymore and they don't make trainers like Buster.

The movie has been uploaded on Youtube and can be seen by clicking on,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGQwZLPb1dk>

Bus would continue to run the gym until March 26, 1995 when a third heart attack claimed his life.

The Oliphant legend carries on! Having touched so many people with Buster's hard work and dedication, Oliphant's Academy of Physical Culture was adopted by a dedicated group of members, to operate and maintain the gym to this day! The gym now has an honour system of signing in, a posted membership list and the gym is open 7 days a week from 6am to 12pm.

[Both the original gym located at 648 Bloor Street just west of Bathurst and the current gym location at 501 Dupont St. just west of Bathurst are in the Seaton Village and the initiative to have a lane named after "William Oliphant" has the support of the Seaton Village Residents Association support.](#)