

Expression of Condolence for George A. Cohon by Toronto City Council

Moved by: Councillor Shelley Carroll

Seconded by: Mayor Olivia Chow

The Mayor and Members of Toronto City Council are deeply saddened to learn of the passing of George A. Cohon, C.C.O.Ont – a great Canadian businessman, philanthropist, and the founder of McDonald's Canada. He passed away on November 24, 2023, at the age of 86.

George Cohon was born in Chicago, where he graduated from Northwestern Law School in 1961. As a young lawyer, George's life changed dramatically after he represented a client in negotiations with Ray Kroc, founder of McDonald's. Ray saw George's talent and brought him into McDonald's as its first international licensee in eastern Canada. In 1971, George was made the Chairman, President, and Chief Executive Officer of McDonald's Canada, overseeing 50 franchises and eventually growing to over 1000 franchises.

George was not just a businessman. Driven by a dedication to philanthropy and belief in the importance of family, George founded Ronald McDonald House Charities Canada. George was a tireless and passionate ambassador for Ronald McDonald House Charities throughout his life and often spent time personally comforting the many families who called a Ronald McDonald House home.

In 1973, George became a proud Canadian citizen and Torontonian. One of his many philanthropic efforts in the City came in helping to save the Toronto Santa Claus Parade. Regardless of George's Jewish faith, he recognized the importance of the parade as a celebration of unity, family and togetherness in the City. George would co-chair the Original Santa Claus Parade for many years.

Despite his notable philanthropic and business legacies, George may be best-known for bringing the Golden Arches to the Soviet Union, a 14-year mission he termed 'Burger Diplomacy.' In 1990, after years of determination, he opened the McDonald's in Pushkin Square in Moscow. McDonald's was one of the most recognized businesses in history to enter Russia. In recognition of his work, George received Russia's Order of Friendship from President Boris Yeltsin.

George was the recipient of many other awards and honours in his life. He was inducted to the Order of Canada in 1988, and the Order of Ontario in 2000. In 2012, George was

presented with a Key to the City of Toronto in recognition of his enduring community and charity service. Following the ceremony, he brought the Key to the Ronald McDonald House, where he shared it with children receiving care in Toronto. George was an Honorary Governor of York University and Chairman of the Board of the Ontario Science Centre. In August 2023, George was elevated as a Companion of the Order of Canada, the Order's highest level. George will be remembered for his legacy as a businessman and philanthropist. Despite his many accolades, George was always unequivocal that his greatest accomplishment was his family.

The City Clerk is requested to convey, on behalf of the Members of Toronto City Council, our sincere sympathy to George Cohon's family.

December 13, 2023