

# Community pays tribute to 'Angel of Lake Simcoe' (14 photos)

a day ago By: [Miriam King](#)



1 / 14 Grandsons Evan and Tate, with memorial plaque honouring Mary Jane Brinkos and commemorating her passion for Lake Simcoe. | Miriam King, Freelance

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On Jan. 29 of this year, the Town of Innisfil and Big Bay Point community lost a warrior, a champion and protector of Lake Simcoe.

When Mary Jane Brinkos passed away, she left behind a number of legacies – one of which was a wider awareness and appreciation of the health of the lake, and a Friday Harbour Resort reshaped by that awareness.

As a Director of the Innisfil District Association (IDA) that fought the original Friday Harbour proposal

(then Big Bay Point Resort), a founding member of the Ladies of the Lake, Rescue Lake Simcoe and the Simcoe County Greenbelt Association, Brinkos played a role in the development of the Province's Lake Simcoe Protection Plan – and in the back-and-forth struggle that transformed plans for the resort.

The end result was a design that preserved over 200 acres of woodland and wilderness, replanted a grove of endangered butternut trees, created and restored habitat for snakes and turtles, and concentrated development around an environmentally-engineered harbour, introducing policies designed to preserve and support the health of the Lake.

On Friday, Friday Harbour Resort held a ceremony to celebrate the life of Mary Jane Brinkos, its “Angel of the Lake,” and unveil a plaque along the boardwalk as a permanent memorial.

Family members, including Brinkos’ daughter Diana and grandsons Tate and Evan, friends, neighbours and colleagues gathered outside on the boardwalk overlooking her beloved Lake Simcoe.

They were welcomed by Cheryl Shindruk, executive director of Geranium Homes, and Mario Giampietri, Geranium president and partner.

“In all the people I have known, Mary Jane stands out as the champion of our lake,” said Giampietri. “I first felt the energy that is Mary Jane in 2001. Immediately I knew she was a force to be reckoned with.”

He quoted Winston Churchill: “Never give in. Never give in... In nothing, great or small, large or petty, never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense.”

That was Mary Jane Brinkos: fearless, demanding, “she will never give up,” Giampietri said. He used the same words to describe Jim De Gasperis, president and CEO of ConDrain and managing partner at Friday Harbour.

De Gasperis and Brinkos met for the first time in 2015, when a commitment was made: “The long-term health of Lake Simcoe is our priority within the design of Friday Harbour.”

Giampietri concluded, “She understood change will happen, but that doesn’t mean you don’t fight for the best outcomes possible – and that she did. Her energy and her tireless efforts to protect the lake resulted in a remarkable legacy of advocacy.”

“Mary Jane definitely was a champion of Lake Simcoe, and so many other events,” said Innisfil Deputy Mayor Dan Davidson, long-time friend. “Lake Simcoe was her main passion.”

He expressed a hope that visitors and new residents, as they walk past the monument, will stop and read the inscription. “I hope that new residents will ask why, who – and what can I do to keep this

Lake Simcoe so beautiful?"

The memorial was created by artist, landscape architect and designer Mark Schollen, who acknowledged that he never met Brinkos, but understood that "the lake was precious to her."

On a slab of local stone, a stainless steel image of the lake is inscribed with a memorial to the "Angel of the Lake", and angled to catch and reflect the light at certain times of day.

The inscription reads in part, "As a long-time resident of the Big Bay Point community, Mary Jane was instrumental in inspiring and advancing the movement to preserve and enhance the health and sustainability of the Lake Simcoe watershed."

Just beyond the memorial is a view of Lake Simcoe, and the inscription concludes, "You are viewing first hand her remarkable legacy."

Brinkos' grandsons were called up to unveil the plaque. "Tate and Evan, your grandmother changed the world because she believed she could. She never gave up. She made a difference," Giampietri told them.

The ceremony ended with comments by daughter Diana Brinkos, and Indigenous drumming and singing by friend Cyndy Vanier.

"As a child, you never really know what your parents do," said Diana. "I never understood, unfortunately, until she did pass what all those meetings were for."

She thanked everyone for sharing their stories of her mother, and Friday Harbour and Geranium for the memorial and celebration for her mom. "She would be speechless – except we all know Mary Jane; she was never speechless."

What she was, was tireless, fearless, outspoken, determined, and passionate.

"We wanted to find a way to honour the memory of our friendship with Mary Jane and the contributions she's made to Lake Simcoe and the watershed," said Shindruk later, in the Beach Club at Friday Harbour where attendees gathered to share their memories.

The memorial plaque "is anchored in the water. It's got that sparkle that Mary Jane had. It's solid and sturdy, and that's also reflective of Mary Jane – and it's permanent," Shindruk said, noting that it will be seen by everyone who comes to Friday Harbour and walks the boardwalk.

"What better way to honour her memory?"

Geranium has also contributed \$100,000 to the Lake Simcoe Conservation Foundation in Mary Jane Brinkos' name, to continue her work and advocacy, and preserve the health of her beloved lake.



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Miriam King is a journalist and photographer with Bradford Today, covering news and events in Bradford West Gwillimbury and Innisfil.

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