

NEW

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Directions

Click [here](#) to view taped greetings to the Deputy Minister from his OPS colleagues and peers and photographs spanning his years at the ministry, and to hear a musical tribute performed at his farewell reception.

A message from outgoing Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford

“It has been my honour to serve.”



On March 1, 2005, Ron Sapsford took over the helm as Deputy Minister; it marked the beginning of his third stint in what would be a 16-year career at the ministry. Sapsford first arrived at the ministry during the 1980s and held a number of positions, including director of the former Community Hospitals Branch. During the 1990s, he returned as Assistant Deputy Minister of Institutional and Community Services. In between his jobs inside MOHLTC, Sapsford held a number of leadership roles within the health care system, including executive vice-president and chief operating officer of Hamilton Health Sciences and chief operating officer with the Ontario Hospital Association.

As his five years spent as Deputy Minister drew to a close, Sapsford sat down with *NEW Directions* and reflected on a range of issues, including the ministry's achievements on stewardship and the government's ambitious health care agenda. He also looked back on his career and the changes he has witnessed over the years, noting that two things have remained constant: his love of the health care field and the privilege it has been for him to serve in government and the people of Ontario.

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Speakers pay tribute to Deputy Minister at farewell reception

The reception celebrating Ron Sapsford's tenure as Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Health and Long-Term care was a memorable and fitting farewell to someone who has contributed so much to improve Ontario's health care system.

More than 250 people, including friends, family members, and colleagues from the ministry, Ontario Public Service and from across the health care sector attended the farewell reception for Sapsford, held Dec. 15, in the DeGasperi Conservatory at the Toronto General Hospital site of the University Health Network. Dr. Joshua Tepper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Human Resources Strategy, served as the evening's master of ceremonies.

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At the farewell reception celebrating Ron Sapsford's time serving as Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Sapsford (centre) with his wife Aileen (left) and daughter Meaghan (right), graciously accepts and returns the applause of the audience.

Speakers pay tribute to Deputy Minister at

farewell reception



Deb Matthews
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care



Dr. Josh Tepper
Assistant Deputy Minister,
Health Human Resources Strategy



Shelly Jamieson
Secretary of the Cabinet



David Caplan
MPP, Don Valley East



Mark Rochon
President and CEO,
Toronto Rehab



Adalsteinn Brown
Assistant Deputy Minister,
Health System Strategy



George Smitherman
MPP, Toronto Centre



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George Smitherman, MPP, Toronto Centre, said he considered himself privileged to have been Minister of Health and Long-Term Care during Sapsford's time as Deputy Minister. "Working with Ron, I was impressed with the level of energy he had and I was especially impressed with the sense he had that things could be improved," Smitherman said.

Smitherman, the first of the evening's guest speakers, made it clear who benefited the most from Sapsford's dedication, hard work and many accomplishments as Deputy Minister — the people of Ontario.

"On behalf of the 13 million people in the province

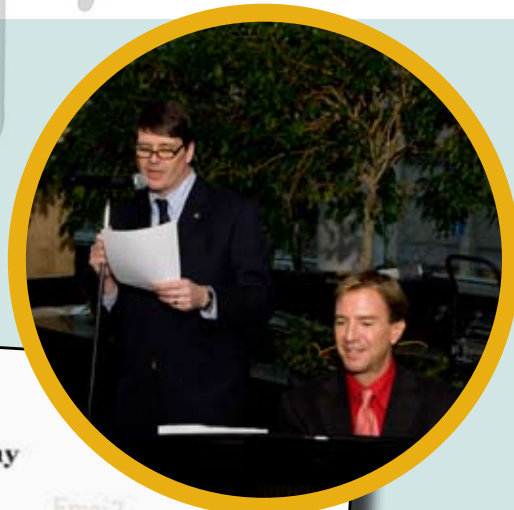
of Ontario, on behalf of the people in the Ministry of Health and for the people working in the health care sector, I offer you our heartfelt thanks for all you've done to advance health care for the people of Ontario. Ron, you are one of the most dedicated public servants I've had the privilege to work with."

David Caplan, MPP, Don Valley East, told the audience that while serving as minister, each week he and Sapsford would get together and simply chat about things going on at the time.

"I think I had much the better of the bargain because I was able to gain a lot of insight from

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Photo inset, right: Brad Sinclair, director of HealthForceOntario, sings Bye Bye Sapsford, accompanied on the piano by Ken Lindsay, a former employee of Communications and Information Branch. The lyrics, by Kirk Szmon, correspondence writer, Communications and Information Branch, and Sinclair, were sung to the tune of Bye Bye Blackbird.



Bye Bye Sapsford
Kirk Szmon & Brad Sinclair, with musical assistance by Ken Lindsay

Verse 1

Here we are all filled with woe
Deputy Ron's set to go
Bye bye Sapsford

You transformed the ministry
Did it all cross-functionally
Bye bye Sapsford

Everyone here knows how much
we'll miss you
As we all reach for another tissue

Our bureaucratic number one,
You led us through H1NI
Sapsford, bye bye

Verse 2

UHN, CHEO,
HSC and HHSC
Bye, bye Sapsford

CCSP, CIB
CO, PO and MMC
Bye, bye Sapsford

CNO and OMA and H-Prac
ICES, OPSEU, PAIRO and ITAC

EHT, MOU, MAC, MRI, FHT, RNAO,
UAP, R&D, STD, FYI, PDQ, SOB and
GTA
POGO and OHA too
Sapsford bye, bye

Verse 3

Long after you take your leave
We'll still be sneezing in our sleeve
Bye, bye Sapsford

He worked with George, Deb and
Dave
He surfed that transformation wave
Bye, bye Sapsford

Five years at the helm seems very
fleeting
A first-class act we wish you were
repeating

We're richer for your visit here
Poorer as you disappear
Sapsford, bye bye



Andre Van Vugt photos



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him during these talks,” Caplan said. “Ron Sapsford is a true public servant and a true leader in health care. I’ve been privileged to have worked with an individual of his calibre. He will be sorely missed.”

Joining the ministry in March 2005, Sapsford has led the ministry’s transition to a stewardship model and overseen the effort to transform the province’s health care system.

“I think today, thanks to the work of Ron Sapsford and all the people around him, confidence has really been restored in our health care system,” said Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care. “And I think no one can take more credit for this turn around in health care in Ontario than Ron. Thank you so very much for all you’ve done.”

Shelly Jamieson, Secretary of the Cabinet, recounted that Sapsford served as a mentor to her when she joined the Ontario Public Service in 2006 as Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Transportation.

“I’m here representing the Ontario Public Service and I’m here to celebrate Ron, and honour and thank you for your service to the province of Ontario. I’m also here to thank my mentor,” Jamieson said. “With

Ron, it’s never, ever, been about him. It has always been about being in the public service. It’s been my privilege, Ron. Thank you and good luck.”

Mark Rochon, President and CEO, Toronto Rehab, said that when Sapsford was appointed Deputy Minister, you could “hear the cheer” from the health care provider community, because of the combination of his experience working for health care providers and working in public service.

“Though he knew the job would be incredibly challenging, Ron enthusiastically embraced his appointment as Deputy Minister because he wanted to make a difference in the lives of the people who rely on and work in Ontario’s health care system,” Rochon said.

Adalsteinn Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health System Strategy, announced that a scholarship in public sector leadership will be created in Ron Sapsford’s name at the University of Ottawa.

“I think the wonderful thing about this gift is that it pays tribute to the legacy of Ron Sapsford,” Brown said.

Brown told the audience that the

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WD Lighthall photo



Lily Choy photo



Photo, top: Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford with Legal Services Branch’s Carole McKeogh (left), deputy director, and Janice Crawford (right), director. To say a special goodbye to Sapsford, the branch presented him with a “mock” graduation hood and a “fabled” honorary Doctor of Laws degree at a recent meeting. Photos, centre and bottom: Fiscal Oversight and Performance Branch, Corporate and Direct Services, bid the Deputy Minister farewell with a breakfast in his boardroom. Branch director Michael Parzei presented Sapsford with the gift of a crystal owl as a symbol of his wisdom.





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“Wherever I go, I know that everyone is working to improve our health care system.”

Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford

phrase “don’t forget about . . .” was one that Sapsford was known to use in meetings to good effect.

“He would always say: ‘Don’t forget about this group of people who have that need.’ And in that way he brought people together around a vision of what we were trying to accomplish.”

Dr. Joshua Tepper, Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Human Resources Strategy, expressed what many in the audience and ministry were thinking.

“Ron, as our Deputy Minister you inspired, you led and you changed the system, always for the better. You had vision and patience and you were a personal mentor to so many, and you helped so many more. You expected

excellence and you always modeled it. You displayed grace under pressure and class always. You defined the role of Deputy Minister and leader,” Tepper said.

Upon taking to the podium to address his friends, family and colleagues, Sapsford thanked everybody for attending and for the creation of the scholarship in his name. In his remarks, he quickly acknowledged the work of others.

“I hasten to add it’s not so much about me as an individual, I’ve always viewed these kinds of accomplishments as a team effort. So, my success is also the success of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care,” Sapsford said.

The Deputy Minister touched on the highlights of his career in health care, and also on the changes and challenges in the past five years within the ministry.

Sapsford said he found that everybody working in the health care system, from those on the front lines of delivering care to those sitting around the Cabinet table, have something in common.

“Wherever I go, I know that everyone is working to improve our health care system. No matter which perspective one brings, people in health care all work to provide the best possible care to our citizens. And, I hope that I’ve been able to contribute to that,” Sapsford said. ■



Guests salute the Deputy Ministry

Current and former colleagues, friends and associates were among a host of well wishers, who attended Deputy Minister Ron Sapsford's farewell party. Many wanted to share their personal memories and recollections of the man that had left a lasting impression on them, whether they had known him for a few years or for decades. Some had worked closely with Sapsford, within or beyond the ministry, during his time as Deputy Minister. Others had forged bonds with him during one of his previous tenures at the ministry. All had praise for the outgoing Deputy Minister — a consummate leader, the kind of leader that everyone hopes to be around.

“Five years out, the government could not have asked for more from any Deputy Minister. He's wise and he's thoughtful. He offers great counsel to the government and terrific leadership to his team. He understands the industry and the partners out there. He is a Deputy who had it all and will be missed terribly.” *Marg Rappolt, Deputy Minister, Community and Social Services.* Rappolt was a former Associate Deputy Minister with MOHLTC and was temporarily serving as Acting Deputy Minister, when Sapsford took over the post in March 2005. She worked closely with Sapsford for the first year of his term.

“He is a very good person,
a gentleman and we'll miss him.
He always has time for everyone.”

Mitchelle Rozario, administrative/tracking coordinator, Deputy Minister's Office. Rozario has worked for Sapsford during his tenure as Deputy Minister and she took time out from her maternity leave to attend his send off.

“Every Tuesday at the MMC [Ministry Management Committee] meeting, there would be a point in the conversation where Ron would have this little bit of a grin and he would raise the right question at the right time — often with a bit of humour — but just enough to turn the conversation and get everybody focused, including the person who was trying to drive a point. But it was done in a way to cause no shame, no embarrassment, but just enough to turn the table conversation. To me, he is just a classic leader, always insightful, positive and encouraging,” *Hugh MacLeod, Associate Deputy Minister to the Premier, Climate Change.* MacLeod worked with Sapsford when he was Assistant Deputy Minister of Health System Accountability and Performance.

“I brought my son in at about four months old. Ron took the two of us into his office, closed the door, put the baby on his table and started playing with him. What more could you ask for? I said to him: ‘Ron, you have appointments, letters to sign off on,’ and he said, ‘that can wait.’ He gave everyone his undivided attention.” *Sophie Georgas, senior consultant, Capital Projects (GTA), Health System Information Management and Investment.* Sapsford was Georgas' director when she worked for the former Community Hospitals Branch in the mid-1980s. Georgas worked for Sapsford again when he was Assistant Deputy Minister of Institutional and Community Services in the 1990s.

“I think Ron is such a really fine person. He is a principled man and he's a very kind human being. I admire that he's very committed to his family and also that he's got such a great sense of humour. He's somebody that you can feel really comfortable talking with.” *Gwen Dubois-Wing, CEO of the North West Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).* Sapsford was instrumental in hiring the LHIN CEOs and had a close working relationship with the LHIN leadership.

“When you think back on all of the leaders who have led, he's one of the good guys for sure. He's steady. It's a bit bittersweet, his leaving.” *Margaret Hart, transition change management consultant, Corporate and Direct Services.*

“Dealing from the industry side, when we worked with him we were comfortable that we were always getting a clear story of what was happening, so there was a lack of ambivalence. This made it comfortable and easier to have business discussions.” *David Johnston, president and CEO of the Canadian Association for Pharmacy Distribution Management.*

“He is a savvy, fair-minded listener. He's a very supportive guy. He knows his way around problems and he can turn a negative into a neutral.” *Dr. Les Levin, head and senior medical advisor, Medical Advisory Secretariat.*

“He gave us phenomenal freedom to be creative and innovative, as long as we were focused on the goals that really mattered. At the end of the day though, he gave us freedom to try things out while he would support us.”

Adalsteinn Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister Health System Strategy, describing Sapsford's working relationship with the ministry's senior management team.

“He is the best friend to everybody.” *Mary Catherine Lindberg, executive director of the Ontario Council of Teaching Hospitals.* Lindberg spent more than 30 years working at the ministry, including as Assistant Deputy Minister, responsible for OHIP. She worked with Sapsford during one of his previous turns at the ministry. ■

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Q: How do you feel about the progress that has been made on the ministry's stewardship transition over the last three years?

A: We have completed a major organizational change that deals not only with boxes and charts, but a real shift in the way the ministry does business. I am thrilled that we are really now at the end of the transition, with the exception of a few divisions that are still wrapping up and going through implementation.

I am tremendously thankful for the way staff has engaged with the whole process. We've gone through this very major reorganization with barely a ripple in the ministry's ability to continue to support the government's agenda and do the day-to-day work of the ministry.

Q: How entrenched is stewardship in the ministry at this point?

A: I don't hear the phrase, 'What is stewardship?' as much anymore. It's no longer an isolated concept. It's now just the way people approach their work and how the ministry organizes itself to accomplish its goals.

Recently, at MMC [Ministry Management Committee], we saw the final outline of the operational plan process for the ministry. It said to me that stewardship is now built into our work process. This is an attempt to link the strategy and goals of the ministry and the government into specific work projects with measurable outcomes and a new way of monitoring the way the work is completed. All this is part of a stewardship culture.

Q: Is it important for staff to recognize that stewardship and the transition aren't vested in any one or two individuals?

A: I was the spokesperson when it was launched. But, the more I talked to people, they said: 'Ron this is the right thing to do. This is the way the ministry should be working'. This is important because when I leave, stewardship will not fall apart. There are enough people in the ministry now who see the value of working cross-divisionally in cooperative teams, and in bringing the best information and knowledge to solve problems.

Now, when an issue arises, people automatically respond with 'Oh, we need to talk to those people over there if we want to advance this particular agenda', and immediately a team is created.

Q: During your tenure, the ministry has achieved many accomplishments within the health care system. If you had to pick just a few achievements which ones are you most proud of?

A: It is really hard for me to pick one or two achievements, but rather I view the last several years as just a whole wave of change in the ministry and the

health care system. What I am most proud of, is that we've delivered on all the government's program commitments at the same time as going through fundamental change inside the ministry.

For example, there was the implementation of the LHINs, which were brand new in the health care system, and all the subsequent changes that resulted to the ministry. The legal branch presented me with a list of the over 300 legislative and regulatory changes that we have made over the last five years, including the Long-term Care Act, which is a huge piece of work.

Then you add, this year's \$42 billion budget and the preparation and management of that and all the new programs and changes in the ministry.

Q: What were your goals coming in five years ago and do you think you have accomplished what you personally set out to do?

A: I had two goals. Before I arrived, the government's intention to create LHINs was public. That was a really strong attractor to come back because it was a change in the system that I thought was very positive. The opportunity to help define it, create the legislation and go through the implementation was certainly one of my goals and that's clearly been accomplished.

The other one is less tangible. In coming, I knew I needed to stay for a reasonable period of time to bring a sense of stability to the leadership of the ministry. I hope that part of what I've done in these five years is to bring this sense of constant direction – not withstanding all the changes.

Q: You've always said to the staff 'we're all in this together', can you reflect back on this thought for a moment?

A: The Deputy Minister can't do the work of the ministry single-handedly. It's always about the team. So, I've always viewed myself as, 'I'm the deputy head of the ministry, but I am just another member of the staff'. I have specific roles and responsibilities, but I have to depend on the hard work of thousands of people every day.

Q: Is there anything that stands out in your mind from your previous incarnations in the ministry?

A: The first time I was here was at the height of a programmatic approach to health care. There is a vast difference now in the way the ministry is organized and what we do.

I spent nine years at the Overlea Blvd. offices [in Toronto] which don't even exist anymore. I had four different jobs there; one was in nursing homes. In those days, Community and Social Services ran the homes for the aged and the Ministry of Health handled the

nursing homes. That's been integrated for many years now.

I was also director of Community Hospitals Branch. Then, community hospitals were in different branches from teaching hospitals. Now we don't have a hospitals branch or division because we're organized around the health system.

Q: What has kept you coming back to the ministry?

A: I have two passions. One is health care and the other is public service. If you follow my career over the years, it's almost 50-50 inside the ministry versus outside in the health care field.

Q: Do you think it helps to have both those perspectives?

A: I purposely set out to work in three different areas: hospitals, because they are so fundamental to health care systems; health planning; and government, to understand the dynamics of government decision making and the impact of legislation. Moving from perspective to perspective helped me in my next position and has helped me make better decisions in my Deputy Minister role.

Q: How did you get your start in health care?

A: At 17-years-old I worked as an orderly at the Toronto East General Hospital. I've always enjoyed the health care area. I trained in biochemistry and physiology, so I have always had an interest in the science side as well.

Q: What will you miss most about the ministry?

A: The people. You can't get work done except through people. I thoroughly enjoyed my years of positive working relationships with the wonderful people at the ministry. They're strong, smart, full of energy, and anxious to find solutions and support the health care system and the public.

Q: What are you looking forward to?

A: In the very short term, I hope I'll go back to some things I've given up, like my organ and piano. I'll have a rest, spend some time thinking about what's next and then find something else to challenge me.

Q: Do you have any parting words for the ministry staff?

A: Have a wonderful holiday season, however you celebrate the holidays. It is so important for people to take a break from the day-to-day work pressures. So, take time for yourself and your family and enjoy yourself. My best wishes for next year. And, I thank the staff for all their support. It has been my honour to serve. ■