

## Frankie Bates and Bob Wardle

### Bates Wardle Award for Lifeguards

Established in 2018 by family and friends in memory of Frances (Frankie) Bates, the Bates Wardle Award for Lifeguards celebrates those who volunteer to help others and recognizes the importance of the role that lifeguards play in the community.

When he was a young teenager, Robert (Bob) Wardle wanted to become a lifeguard, but family financial circumstances impacted his pursuit of this learning. One of his father's friends, Mr. Ingraham, quietly paid for Bob's training, meals, and room and board in Lethbridge in order for Bob to complete his training. In the summer of 1951, Bob got a job at the pool in Brooks, AB.

On one of his days off, August 10, 1951, Bob was in Tilley visiting his parents and friends. After hearing screams from the neighbours', Bob and his friend ran to find that a one-and-a-half-year-old girl had fallen 13 feet into a cistern at her grandparents' home. The water reservoir was topped with a 16-inch square opening leading into a three-foot chute and a 10-foot by five-foot steel tank filled with ice-cold water. Frances (Frankie) Burchak (later Bates) had been in the cistern for an estimated 10 to 15 minutes.

Bob jumped into action, directing the surrounding adults to lower him into the narrow opening. The cistern was completely full, there was no light, and Frankie had sunk to the bottom. Bob dove down three times before his hand finally brushed Frankie's hair and he brought her to the surface. They were pulled out of the cistern, one at a time, and Frankie was not breathing. Her entire body was "as blue as a pair of blue jeans." For 15 minutes Bob performed CPR, until Frankie finally gasped for air. In two days, Frankie made a full recovery.



*Bob Wardle, right, looks at the cistern he rescued Frankie Bates from.*

Reflecting on the moment, Bob said he was "overwhelmed" when the toddler began to breathe. "No one knew what to do," said Bob. "And nobody else present had any rescue training." Bob later shared, "If Mr. Ingraham had not paid to get my training, that little girl would have died."

The Royal Life Saving Society recognized Bob's heroics and selected him to win its inaugural Mountbatten Medal "for the most gallant rescue or rescue attempt undertaken throughout



*Frankie Bates (right) with her granddaughter Ellie Bates, and Bob Wardle.*

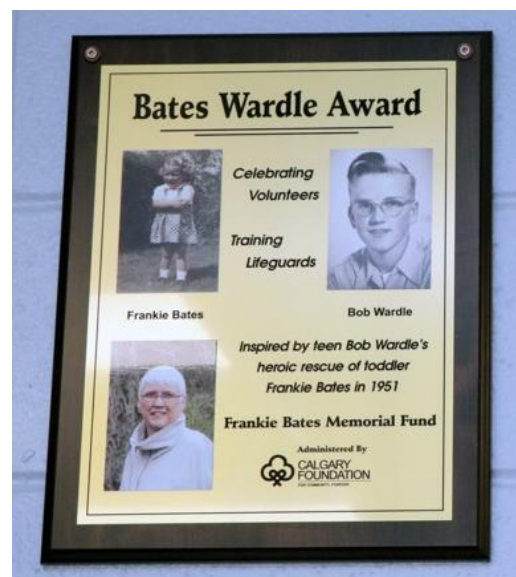
the Commonwealth.” In July 1952, at the Calgary Stampede, visiting British Second World War hero Lord Lovat awarded Bob with the medal.

Throughout her second chance at life, Frankie and Bob would become grateful friends; from time to time sharing family visits at holidays and important events such as Bates’ wedding. Frankie and her husband Gavin moved to Innisfail in 1976 where they established their family and lived their lives together. Frankie made the most of her life and was acknowledged often for her devotion to her family and volunteer service to her community. She even went on to be a lifeguard herself in her younger years. She spent countless hours at hockey rinks, ball diamonds, soccer fields, and golf courses with her three sons – a passion that continued with her seven grandchildren. She volunteered her time for community sports, the food bank, local schools and various charities. Frankie loved to travel and watch the wildlife on the lake and is remembered most for her love of crafting, reading and baking – something that she loved to share with those around her. In 2017, Frankie passed away from cancer and Bob and his wife Phyllis attended her funeral.

Around 1981, Bob and Phyllis made their home in Cochrane where they became active members of their new community. Years later, Frankie and Gavin’s son Michael, and the Wardles, discovered they were new neighbours living on the same street, and the Wardles became surrogate grandparents to Frankie and Gavin’s Cochrane grandchildren.

Bob was an active member of the Cochrane community and loved to rebuild bicycles and donate them to the Cochrane Activettes Club so that they could give them to children at Christmas. He was also a member of the Lions Club and other service clubs for many years. His career was in hospital administration, and he had a love of aviation after he served as a navigator with the Royal Canadian Air Force in the 1950s and then earned his Pilot License in 1971 and remained a private pilot until the late 1980s. In 2024, both Bob and Phyllis passed away.

To celebrate the 65 years she lived after almost drowning, Frankie’s family established the Bates Wardle Award for Lifeguards in both Frankie and Bob’s names. The award is given annually to two students ranging from age 12 to Grade 12 from Innisfail and Cochrane who are pursuing lifeguard training or certification and contribute to their community. From 2018 to 2022 Bob participated with Frankie’s family members in all the award presentations. The award keeps Frankie and Bob’s memory alive and honors the courage and skill that lifeguards bring to our local communities.



*Bates Wardle Award Plaque at Innisfail Pool*