

CHANCES building renamed Norman and Joyce MacDougall Centre^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

A couple who helped to establish an early childhood learning centre in O'Leary were honoured with having the building named after them.

In 2016, CHANCES family centre began offering its programming in O'Leary. At first they were only set up in the basement of the town hall, where they continue to operate now.

However, as the program began to grow, CHANCES needed additional space. That led to the organization leasing space in a building directly across from the town hall then owned by Norman and Joyce MacDougall.

"I had no idea that first meeting with Norman, and very shortly thereafter Joyce, would lead to something so special," said Ann Robertson, former executive director for CHANCES. "Not only the complete renovation of this beautiful building, but a deep partnership and friendship endured."

Mr MacDougall passed away in 2019. Shortly afterwards, CHANCES purchased the Beechwood Avenue building from the MacDougall family. On Aug 10, CHANCES recognized the couple's dedication by renaming the building the Norman and Joyce MacDougall Centre.

"The building has become home to many CHANCES programs, now offering support for children and families in the West Prince area," said Ms Roberson. "We know the positive impacts on children and families will last a lifetime."

Ms Robertson said there was a lot of challenges in those early days of getting the centre up and running and making sure the building was suitable to their needs. But no challenge seemed too large for Mr MacDougall to overcome.

"With an early learning centre, the legislative requirements are you need a certain amount of green space," explained Ms Robertson. "Initially when considering renovating the building and working with Norman, green space was an issue. Lo' and behold, Norman bought the lot across the road so we would have green space."

She told this story while the sound of children playing in the background could be heard echoing from the outdoor play area across the street from the centre.

Described as a quiet couple, Ms MacDougall said while her late husband might not have gone for having his name on a building, she appreciates the recognition.

"I think he deserves the acknowledgement for all the effort he put into getting it ready for them," she said.

In attendance with Ms MacDougall was the couple's two adult children and their four grandchildren.

Ms MacDougall said raising two visually impaired sons might have had been why the early childhood learning centre became such an important project for the couple.

"The community was really good to us when the boys were growing," she said. "I think getting the boys educated here and wanting to make sure there's facilities here for kids who might need a little more care... we never really talked about it, but I'm thinking that might have played a part."

Vanessa Poirier, the West Prince Best Start supervisor for CHANCES, said sometimes establishing something new in a small community can be challenging.

"Without the support of passionate people like Norman, it couldn't have been as successful as it is," she said. "His patience and determination never wavered and his goal was to have childcare with no barriers and that all are welcomed to attend. Completely inclusive. With grace, he walked through any of the challenges that we met to get to the other side and have a centre that everybody in the community can be proud of."

Ms Roberson said the partnership and friendship that developed as a result of the involvement of the MacDougalls will be something she

will always cherish.

“We are delighted to officially name this building the Norman and Joyce MacDougall Centre and in doing so we are honouring them as a quiet couple, loved and respected by all,” she said. “They never wanted any fanfare or recognition for their efforts and contributions. They worked hard, raised their family, helped their neighbours and contributed to their community. In doing so, they bettered the lives of all of us.”

Continuing to be humbled by the recognition, Ms MacDougall said it’s going to take some time for her to get used to seeing the sign on the centre with her and husband’s name on it.

“We would do something, take pride in it and that was good enough,” she said.

Region: Prince Edward Island ^[3]

Tags: childcare spaces ^[4]

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