

Creating a lasting legacy

Article by Allan Cook
Photographs by Jan Pitman



Gord Durnan and John Miller, general manager of Muskoka Steamship and Historical Society, chat about how charitable gifts assist Muskoka's cultural and heritage attractions and organizations, including the *R.M.S. Segwun*.

The Muskoka Community Foundation was established to help others leave a lasting legacy in Muskoka

The wide living room window of Gord Durnan's modest Gravenhurst home looks out on a wooded community pathway between his family's house and the one next door. It's a quiet street in a close neighbourhood in a town where Durnan has deep roots, tracing back to Charles Mickle of the Mickle-Dyment lumber dynasty; philanthropist and visionary behind the Gravenhurst Opera House.

Durnan's love for Muskoka and his dedication to its people was made clear during his years as the managing director of the South Muskoka Hospital Foundation, and when he retired in 2005 it wasn't long before a few like-minded individuals decided to tap into his experience, training and skill as a fund-raiser, philanthropy advisor and charitable organization manager.

"I had a call from some donors who said there's no place in Muskoka to leave a legacy that will help a wide variety of charities," Durnan says, recalling the genesis of the new Muskoka Community Foundation where he serves as chair.

"These were people who'd gotten to know me over the years. They have some of their funds in community foundations in various cities and wanted to be able to do the same here. So I started meeting with some of those people and over a year or two, we tested the idea on other people and pulled together a board, sought some legal counsel, and applied for our incorporation last year. We received our incorporation notice in December," Durnan says with pride.

The Muskoka Community Foundation joins over 160 other similar organizations in the Community Foundations of Canada, the oldest of which was founded in Winnipeg in 1921.

"The whole concept of a community foundation is about people – people meeting their dreams," Durnan says. "It's not about the board, it's not about any particular charity – it's about Muskoka in its broadest sense. Of building the capacity to be the greatest community; with the greatest organizations delivering service and meeting the needs of the people of Musko-

ka. From youth, children and women to arts to culture to the environment. All of these need to be strong to make Muskoka strong."

To do so, the Muskoka Community Foundation will manage a fund, providing grants to organizations throughout the region.

"What community foundations do is act as a savings bank for a community," explains treasurer Andy Griffiths of Bracebridge. "When we do get donations, or shares, or contributions, we preserve the capital by investing it and only give away a dividend to interests. If, for example, we can accumulate capital of five million over say the next three years, at four per cent we would have \$200,000 to give away. This isn't like giving to a hospital campaign where they raise the capital and spend the capital; here the physical capital is preserved for long-term. Over time we can achieve some reasonable, realistic growth goals."

The Vancouver Foundation, founded in 1941 on a gift of \$1,000, now oversees a fund of almost \$800 million, the largest in Canada. According to Durnan, community foundations have seen their biggest growth over the last 20 years.

"The economy in Canada has been so great; a lot of wealth has been generated and those people really wanted to say thank you to Canada, to the community that gave them the opportunities," he says. "We've seen a tremendous growth in some of the community foundations because of the ability now to give gifts of appreciated securities and stock."

Gifts to community foundations are often bequests or other special, one-time donations.

"That's one of the beauties of endowments. We're not in competition with charities for their annual giving dollars – we hope they'll be growing and more successful than ever," Durnan says, explaining that operating as a fund allows the Muskoka Community Foundation the flexibility to work with donors when the time is right for them.

"It's not like we have to raise so much every year to keep our doors open or to do this or to do that; we're here when it's right for the donor. We want



Carolyn Bray, executive director of the YWCA Muskoka; Gord Durnan, chair of the Muskoka Community Foundation, and foundation treasurer Andy Griffith discuss the importance of philanthropic funding for social agencies (above left). Muskoka Community Foundation literature explains the various different charitable options and how to make a contribution to the foundation (above right).

the donors to continue to do the great things they're doing every year for all of the Muskoka non-profits and charities because that is really critical to everyday reality.

"Our invitation is to donors and families and businesses to say when the time is right for you to do more, and you want to do it on a broader base and you want some help, both in terms of knowing that the money is going to be invested forever and that you want to participate in determining how we help your favourite charities and emerging needs, then the community foundation may be right for one of your gifts. The donors are in charge and I think that's kind of exciting."

Donors can say exactly which community organizations and needs they want their gift to benefit, or they can choose to make the decision annually.

"If they could give a gift of \$100,000 or \$50,000 to the community foundation, we would invest it and every year we could sit with them and say, 'We've got \$8,000 in investment income: how would you like that distributed?'" Durnan explains. "So, we become the broker for their giving back to the charities in Muskoka."

Many gifts will not be specifically directed by the donor, and one of the next steps for the Muskoka Community Foundation will be to create a grants committee who will decide how to best disburse the investment income.

"We've got lots of people that have already started to say, 'I'd love to be on a grants committee – I know a lot about the social service sector,' or, 'I know about the arts sector.' To bring those people together . . . you become totally community responsive. You've got responding to the donors, and now we're responding to the community," Durnan says. "Then my job then is to

"If we can help by creating, through the community foundation, a vehicle for endowed money to benefit Muskoka forever and ever, that's our role. That's what we're all about."

sit back and smile and watch it all happen and say, 'Wow, isn't Muskoka great?'"

As a fully accredited charitable organization, the Muskoka Community Foundation is ready to sit down and help potential donors decide how to best invest in Muskoka.


"We have sent out an announcement to over 300 families and individuals that we've identified over the years might have an interest in the com-

munity foundation," Durnan explains.

Through that effort, Durnan has already been able to work with a couple who were interested in arranging a bequest.

"Upon their passing the Muskoka Community Foundation would receive their estate to be then invested in perpetuity and given the investment income on an annual basis to their three favourite Huntsville charities. They're not multi-millionaires, but they're real people that really care about Muskoka and this is a beautiful, beautiful gesture on their part."

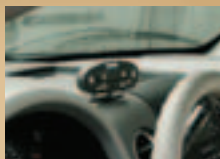
Sitting in his living room in Gravenhurst recounting the tale, Durnan is clearly moved. Dressed in a comfortable sweater vest and short-sleeved shirt, he is soft-spoken and focused, exuding warmth and confidence.

"This is for the donor, and it's for the community. And it's a commitment to the future of Muskoka. We are here only as volunteers who care about donors making a difference, and we care about the community being the best possible community it can be. We want the charities and the non-profits to be the strongest and the most successful they can possibly be," he says, his passion lighting his sharp eyes. "If we can help by creating, through the community foundation, a vehicle for endowed money to benefit Muskoka forever and ever and ever, that's our role. That's what we're all about." 

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