

SDCF's John Mytz Memorial Fund pays tribute to lifelong love of reading



Irene, with John, created the John Mytz Memorial Fund with his love of reading in mind. The fund will support the Gaynor Family Regional Library

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John Mytz had several passions in his life, including his wife Irene, their four children and many grandchildren, the waterways that surround his hometown of Selkirk, his work with the Coast Guard and reading a good book.

It was his love of reading that his wife Irene decided would be best served by the John Mytz Memorial Fund, a new Selkirk and District Community Foundation fund, created after his passing last April.

Born in Selkirk in 1932, Irene says John had a library card since the time he began reading and as a young boy started spending time at the library, then located near where the mall is today.

“John was a very avid reader and he could remember things, a lot of trivia and a lot of history and I would ask him things and he would always have the answer for me,” Irene recalled.

“He didn't flaunt his knowledge or intelligence. He just wasn't that kind of guy, he was a very modest fellow. That's what I liked about him. He was not a flashy type of person. So he loved the library and he was a very well-read person.”

The John Mytz Memorial Fund will provide financial assistance by funding the general operations, collection management and capital projects of the Gaynor Family Regional Library.

Aaron Martyniw, Chair of the SDCF, said it's people like the Mytz family that keep the Foundation in the wonderful position of being 'Here for Good'.

“At the Foundation we are indebted to people like Irene Mytz and her family who made the important decision to create a fund in John's honour,” Martyniw said.

“A memorial fund tells the story of a person, in this case Mr. John Mytz, who cared about his family and his community and will now be forever recognized for not only what he meant to his family and friends, but his caring nature and commitment to community. The Mytz family was involved in the very first donation and now, in our

25th year, they've made this fantastic contribution. We thank the Mytz family for their thoughtfulness."

John and Irene have been connected to the SDCF since its very beginning, when a group that has come to be known as the Maple Drive Gang held a retirement party for two residents of the street and donated leftover cash collected for the party and gifts to the newly formed Foundation.

Irene was one of the retirees – Walter Budy the other – and both declined any gifts at the party, leaving \$40 that organizers needed to find a suitable home for.

Roberta Chic suggested the Foundation, the party honourees agreed, and history was made with the donation being among the first ever made to the Foundation.

Irene said they've been part of the Foundation's donor family ever since, giving money on various occasions.

"We felt what better thing to do than give to your community," she said.

Selkirk was both John's and Irene's home for all their lives, save for time spent in Winnipeg at school, and both had a love of their hometown, and each other.

They grew up near each other, she on Taylor Avenue, he on Robinson, and though they knew whom the other was, they weren't friends, she said.

By the time they went to high school, John, a graduating student and winner of the Governor General's Award, had caught Irene's eye. A member of the glee club at the time, she remembers being impressed with the graduate.

"I thought, 'I like smart men, I like smart fellows'," she laughed.

But still, romance was a ways away. While staying in residence at the St. Boniface Hospital's nursing school, Irene called John and asked if he could round up some friends to be dates for her and her nursing girlfriends, who were about to attend a fancy ball.

He obliged, but the courtship didn't begin until nursing school was completed and Irene had moved back to Selkirk. She was working at the Selkirk hospital and living with her mom when she called John one New Year's Day and asked him over for coffee.

"He came over to visit every day after that," she said, and about a year later in May of 1958, they were married.

While Irene worked as a nurse, retiring as the surgical charge nurse from Selkirk General, John worked for the Federal Department of Transport, later known as the Coast Guard, based out of Selkirk.

It was a career he loved.

In an article in the *Seaports and the Shipping World* publication in 1992, the author had high praise for John, who at that time had worked for the Coast Guard for 31 years.

“His exceptionally calm and friendly manner inspires immediate confidence,” the article says.

“Visiting with him is a real pleasure. If I were shipwrecked on Lake Winnipeg during a violent gale, just knowing that he’s in charge of the base would instil some degree of hope which might not otherwise be present.”

In the Selkirk Journal’s June 9, 1992 issue, Mytz, who had retired one month earlier, is quoted as saying:

“I like to think I have Viking blood in me...I guess it was natural that I found a job in a boat. I liked it and enjoyed it and wouldn’t have traded it for anything.”

Deciding where the John Mytz Memorial Fund should be directed was difficult, Irene says, simply because he was so passionate about his job, but ultimately, his love of books, and family, steered her to the Gaynor Family Regional Library.

“That big, beautiful library, when I see that children’s section I think, ‘wow, wouldn’t that have been wonderful for our children’,” she said.

“I enjoy seeing how beautiful it is that young moms and their children have that place to go to, and anyone else that wants to use the library. You can sit outside and enjoy the area. I’m very happy that we chose the library for the fund.”

Learn more about the SDCF in its annual Community Report, which can be found online at sdcf.ca.

The Selkirk and District Community Foundation is a charitable organization that provides financial support to charitable causes and agencies in the region, which includes Selkirk, St. Andrews and St. Clements. Gifts from donors enable the Foundation to support countless groups and individuals in our community. The Foundation has given in excess of \$2.7 million to more than 125 local charities and community organizations during its 25 years. For more details contact SDCF Executive Director Bev Clegg at 204.785.9755.