

Honouring dying Mom's wishes

By Stew Slater
Staff Reporter

St. Marys, Ontario, January 19, 2011 - When Isabel (Chesterfield) Kennedy passed away in 2003 in Lockport, New York, her son Mike and his brother were perplexed as to how they were going to carry out one condition of her will: establishing some sort of trust fund to support a community-based service or organization in her home town of St. Marys, Ontario.

Now, thanks to a persistence that eventually saw him receiving personal advice from New York State's attorney general, and a personal visit from Town of St. Marys CAO, Rob Brindley, those dying wishes - to the tune of \$235,000 - have been honoured.

In an interview with the Journal Argus last week, the unassuming Mike Kennedy (seemingly still under the mistaken impression such things can be done quickly) repeatedly apologized for having taken so long to make Isabel's donation a reality. But last Friday, Jan. 14, the Buffalo-area resident was a special guest at the Festival Theatre for the Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation's second annual Mayor's Gala.

"They want me to get up and talk, and I don't know if I want to talk," Kennedy admitted. Instead, he'd rather see a smaller ceremony once the Foundation decides where it will send its first contribution from the Annie and Isabel Chesterfield endowment - wherever that might be. One thing's for certain: Kennedy will do whatever he can to ensure it goes towards his mother's home town.

"We can't administer this thing. We live too far away," he explained, when asked about the process of choosing the Stratford and Perth County Community Foundation. "But you don't want to give it to a trust company, and you don't want to give it to a bank."



Annie Chesterfield



Isabelle Kennedy

So eventually, on what he described as "a strong suggestion" from his state's attorney general, he decided to approach the Foundation about its "donor-advised funds." The establishment of such funds includes stipulations about where pay-outs are directed.

The fund is named in honour of both Isabel Kennedy and her mother, Annie Chesterfield. Following the death of her husband, James, in the early 1900s flu epidemic, Annie raised six children on her own. They lived (as Annie's daughter-in-law Mae Chesterfield - along with one of her sons and his family - continues to do) in the stately brick home on the very crest of the hill on Ontario Street North.

Mike Kennedy always remembers his mother retelling with pride and fondness how Annie saved enough money to send her daughter, Isabel, to the University of Western Ontario in the 1930s. Isabel graduated with an Accounting degree, one of just two women in her class.

"She always said, 'when I get old and accumulate enough money, I'm going to set something up in (Annie's) name'," the loving son recalled. "And when we knew she was going to die, I promised my mom right there, between me and my brother, we'd get it done."

Annie Chesterfield died in St. Marys in 1940.