

Lorne Kelly: the man out of the public eye

By Gill Foss

Lorne Kelly was best known throughout the Ottawa region and beyond for his prominence in the funeral industry with his seven Kelly Funeral Homes, but this reflected only half of the man. He was much more than his public persona. A humble man with a love for and empathy with those suffering or in need stretched far beyond the comfort and compassion he bestowed on those who used his funeral services. He spread his love for people and his desire to improve the lot of those less fortunate through many of the organizations we now take for granted in this city.

Born the second son of a Roman Catholic farming family in the Osgoode area he found his calling soon after arriving in Ottawa.

In 1982 he and a group of like-minded people met to discuss setting up a soup kitchen for those having difficulty holding body and soul together during difficult times. Started in the basement of St. Brigit's Church on St. Patrick Street in centre town and run by volunteers, it was the first program of its kind in the city.

From this limited beginning it grew to become the Shepherds of Good Hope, a major shelter for the homeless. Rob Eady, the Public Relations Coordinator for the organization recalls how the preparation of that first sandwich has now blossomed into the provision of 700,000 meals served each year, and far more than an answer to the needs of the hungry.

“Lorne Kelly started his involvement in an administrative role by establishing the policies on which the organization operates,” stated Eady. “From that important starting point he was always there to offer support for our clients. He saw how important it was to offer guidance and get youth off the street. He was a tireless worker on all our campaigns to raise money.”

In the mid-80s he was significantly involved in setting up the Ottawa Food Bank according to Peter Tilley, its current Executive Director. “I’ve been here for 15 years and he was one of our major supporters over all that period,” he recalled.

Another of his community activities was as a Board member of the Crime Stoppers where he worked in an administrative and organizational capacity from its early days. His contributions were recognized with an honorary membership in the

professional organization of the Ottawa Police. The Ottawa Firefighters organization awarded him with a similar honorary position.

In addition to his other involvement in humanitarian endeavours, Lorne Kelly was a major ambassador and champion of the residents of St. Patrick's Home through his participation in the Home's Foundation, according to Managing Director Jennifer Conley.

“He assisted us in promoting the Home to other benefactors and community leaders and was instrumental in attracting fundraising contributions. He generously made it possible for those of our residents who could not afford a funeral or burial to be provided with a dignified passing and an appropriate remembrance at the end of their lives.”

In 2006 the Irish Society of the National Capital Region honoured Lorne Kelly with the Irish Person of Distinction Award, partly because of his standing in the funeral industry but also to recognize his outstanding contribution to the social community for his quiet, behind the scenes work for Crime Stoppers, St. Patrick's Home and The Shepherds of Good Hope.

As an offshoot of his funeral business, Lorne Kelly worked with the federal government on the development of military funeral protocol and between 1968 and 1972 he liaised with the Departments of National Defence and Veterans Affairs to revise the funeral regulations for Canadian Vets. This relationship led to Kelly Funeral Homes being given the unique opportunity to be involved with the repatriation and interment of the Unknown Soldier.

This self-made man started a small business and turned it into an empire through his own efforts and an innate compassion and empathy for those less fortunate or in need of spiritual support. Not without hardship in his own life, he followed his deeply held belief that those who have the opportunity and wherewithal to contribute to the benefit of the wider society, should do so. This selflessness was an attribute he passed along to his children who, in 2005, following the sale of the Kelly funeral business, created a family endowment at the Community Foundation of Ottawa. The focus of this gift is to assist in the areas of mental health, addiction, and palliative care.

The passing of Lorne Kelly in February this year left a void in local philanthropic circles that will be difficult to fill. His humanity touched so many people that his name will for long be revered in this community.

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