



The tile mosaic showing Charlie Donevan in a rowboat representing Gananoque

CHARLIE DONEVAN

The Man in the Mural

By Lorraine Payette

Gananoque loves its heroes. They named a park after Joel Stone, the Branch 92 Legion for Colonel Russel Britton, Randy Payne's name is on the war memorial – all have made a lasting difference in the history of the town and the memories of its people. However, they wanted to do something different for Charlie Donevan, so they built him into a large panel which will become part of the massive

Canada 150 Mosaic – a mural consisting of thousands of hand painted tiles and images from all over Canada celebrating the nation – where we've been, what we've become, where we're going next. Each unit is a car on a train linking the country together, and Charlie is appropriately shown in a boat here in the Thousand Islands, waiting to take on his next adventure.

When you walk into Donevan's Hardware, you might have to wait a bit to get a chance to talk to him. Most likely he'll be busy assisting a customer, helping a visitor find a service or place to visit, or he'll be checking stock. This is a hardworking, conscientious businessman who knows that in order to succeed you have to put that extra drive into your work.

Born on July 31, 1924, Charlie grew up in the town and the store, always listening, always learning, always reaching out to bring people and their needs together in a way that would benefit all involved. He inherited the store, founded in 1872 by his grandfather, and with help from his family, is continuing to keep up its proud traditions.

"I used to have a business in Gananoque just down the street from here called Zippers," said Doug Richmond, long time friend who was up visiting from Tennessee. "I came up here to visit Charlie, and he put me to work. Charlie was always a wealth of knowledge for me during the business years, so I'm happy to help him. The man is 92, by himself, in a store, still cutting glass, still putting screens in doors, and I'm just amazed. It's a pleasure for me to come in and be part of this."

Charlie has a unique knack for putting people and jobs together to make things happen.

"I see a lot of things that could be accomplished, but I know I'm not able to do them," said Charlie. "Because of the business and the store, I know a lot of people in town and I know their potential. I try to open doors and find people I can fit in to do those jobs. I've done an awful lot of that during my lifetime."

Charlie has long had an interest in the out of doors and in preserving our natural heritage. He studied Civil Engineering at Queens which gave him the skills he needed in surveying and other areas to do the work necessary when he and his wife started the Landon Bay Centre in the 1950s.

"We spent many days down there," he said. "She would go down there around the first of May to work and stay into the fall, operating the campground. We did that for about 45 years. Recently, John MacLeod arranged to have a dry stone bridge built at the centre in her honour."

Charlie camped and fished in Algonquin Park, and to this day is active in trying to preserve the former Macker property, Rotary Beach and Bay Road in Gananoque.



"I spent my youth on the river," said Charlie. "My grandfather had a cottage at the head of Tremont Island, and we used to build tin boats over there. We'd get in them and paddle them out to meet the ferry that came from Clayton before we had the bridge so we could ride the waves, and then we'd purposely sink and the people on the boat thought that we were goners. We'd really make it look bad, because we'd stay underwater for awhile and then we'd pop up and swim back to the island. It was a lot of fun."

The memory of all that fun induced him to bring back the tin boats in 2009 and again in 2015. Both times he encouraged the young people of Gananoque to build their boats out of roofing tin, decorate them and race each other. They were delighted to discover just how much fun they could have doing something simple and old fashioned in the great outdoors.

"My grandfather was Mayor of Gananoque at one time, I was on the Council and I was Chairman of the Board of Works for a few years," said Charlie.

He was instrumental in setting up the VAGA Gallery after taking adult lessons in art from Henry Fyvinkl at the High School, and was actively involved at Grace Church for many years. He even convinced the Ontario Seed Company to donate this year's left-over seed stock to the Community Garden.

In addition to his work with different events and activities to stimulate and delight others, and protecting the area for all, Charlie and his lovely wife Kay had three children. Although their son has moved to Windsor, their two daughters continue the family tradition with each working in hardware. These adult children have blessed the family with 6 grandchildren and 6 great-grandchildren. One of them is bound to be another Charlie, out there improving the world for all of us one project at a time. **LH**

Clockwise: Charlie with his brother Bill and their cousin Frank Seward; Charlie and the seeds the OSC is donating to the Community Garden; Charlie in his tin boat circa 1930; Early 1900s photo of Donevan's Hardware store. They carried groceries and other items as well as hardware. Hanging from the ceiling are hammocks and an enormous bunch of bananas, to the right are buggy whips.