

THOUSAND ISLANDS PLAYHOUSE HONOURS GORD BROWN



By Lorraine Payette

Summer brings visions of swimming, camping, canoeing, kayaking, all those things that build character and lasting memories. It also is a time to enjoy live theatre performed by seasoned professionals, drawing crowds from around the world. Sometimes it all comes together in a way that makes everything bigger and better than before.

"Early in 2018 I was told that the stage at the Springer Theatre would not be able to support the productions that we had planned for the season," said Brett Christopher, Managing Artistic Director for the Thousand Islands Playhouse. "That extra \$20,000 expense could have been catastrophic. We really didn't know what to do."

Long before the Playhouse came into existence, the Springer had been the home of the Gananoque Canoe Club. Many young people had learned about boating off of its docks, and had gone on to greater things in life. One of these young people was Gord Brown, best known as MP for Leeds-Grenville-Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes, who had a life-long interest in and passion for sports and the town where he grew up. Although his interest in hockey was better known, he had never forgotten his happy times with the GCC.

Christopher visited the MP in his office and was soon hooked up with Tom Russell of the Thousand Islands Community Development Corporation. Working together, it wasn't long before the funding was in place and the new stage well on its way.

"Gord made many of the investments in the Thousand Islands region possible by virtue of the work he did to bring Eastern Ontario development programming to the area," said Russell. "It's from that pot of money that we've been able to invest in the Thousand Islands Playhouse and so many other wonderful initiatives throughout the area."

In late March, TICDC provided \$10,000 for the project. Combining the funding with community support from Stephen Anderson (Andrecon Inc.) and Ken O'Connor (Gananoque Home Hardware) in the form of

labour and building materials, the stage was replaced and ready for the new season.

Sadly, MP Brown died unexpectedly in early May 2018, before the project could be completed. The entire region was in shock, and the Playhouse wanted to find some way to pay tribute to this man who had helped them so much.

"To honour his love of hockey and Gananoque, a centennial silver dollar was embedded into the stage at 'centre ice' by his brother Jeff Brown," said Christopher.

"Our parents collected silver dollars for us back in the sixties, and I couldn't think of a more fitting place to put one in Gord's memory," said Brown.

The Playhouse wanted to go a step farther and keep MP Brown's memory alive at the Canoe Club. They decided to dedicate \$1 from each ticket sold to their production of *The Canadian* (which ran in July/August 2018) towards a bursary in MP Gord Brown's name at the Gananoque Canoe Club. The GCC, former tenants at the Playhouse's dockside theatre location, was a cause near and dear to the former MP who had been a champion kayaker with the club in the 1970s.

On September 25, 2018, the TI Playhouse proudly presented a cheque in the amount

of \$5,252 to the GCC to create a bursary in memory of MP Brown.

"I felt that it was imperative that we find some way to celebrate his legacy and to follow in his footsteps by giving back to the community," said Christopher. **LH**

Above: A young Gord Brown with one of his medals for kayaking (property of the Brown family)



The silver dollar placed at "centre ice" in the Springer Theatre stage in honour of Gord Brown (From Playhouse video, "Gord Brown's Silver Dollar")



Brett Christopher, Managing Artistic Director, and Melissa Pearce (centre) of the Playhouse presenting a cheque in the amount of \$5,252 to the Gananoque Canoe Club to create a bursary. The money represented \$1 from each ticket sold to the 2018 production of "The Canadian"