

## The JournalNEWS

## Home is where the heart is for Sandra and Robert Lawn

By KATE SKEELLY

PRESCOTT- From the Lego boat resting on the fireplace made by one of their eight grandchildren at 10 years old, to a framed photo hanging on the wall of their visit with the Queen of England, Sandra and Robert Lawn's home in Prescott seems like it was built just for them.

In reality, the over 200-year-old stone house with a bright red door and shutters oozes all the love and dedication that the couple has been giving to Prescott for nearly 50 years.

Both having served as mayor of the town, Sandra and Robert share a passion for bringing the community together and working as a team to achieve greatness. Sandra's 15 years as the leader of Prescott have proven her to be the longest serving mayor in the history of the town, and the decade and a half was put to good use.

"It was a wonderful experience for me," Lawn said. "I think I had a knack because of my mother and father being the way they were."

Growing up in mining towns across Canada, her upbringing was full of nothing short of dedication and leadership as her father was a mining engineer and her mother took part in Girl Guides and church groups.

Founding the South Grenville Economic Development Commission and hosting Queen Elizabeth II in 1984 for Ontario's bicentennial just scratch the surface of her accomplishments in head office. Lawn, and many others, remember her own speech in front of the Queen for the unforgettable way she caught her hat in midair after it flew off her head. The Queen made quite an impression on the Lawns, offering more advice than just to use more hatpins.

"She was so quiet and reserved at the beginning of the visit, but by the end it was absolutely wonderful," Lawn said. "That was a very important day for Prescott. It really showed the world what a great little town this is."

Prescott would not be the same if it were not for her husband's positivity and outstanding community service as he served as mayor from 2000 to 2006. Smiling and glancing at the framed photo on the table beside her of their three daughters, Andrea, Kerrie and Julia, all grown up, Lawn reminisced on the days when she and Robert were quite the eye-catching dancers.



"Students would all gather around and we would be in the middle just jiving," she laughed. "He really did enjoy being mayor, and people just love him."

With Robert's role at South Grenville District High School transitioning from the head of the history department, to vice-principal, and ultimately to principal, and having an uncle who worked for the catholic school-board and on council, the name Lawn was well-known around town. So it did not come as a surprise when Lawn set her sights on running for office, changing the community, and bettering the waterfront as soon as she moved to Prescott.

Lawn's interest in the environment sparked her desire to rid the phosphates in the harbour's water, not wanting her children to grow up surrounded by parts of town that looked dangerous and unwelcoming. Working from the ground up, she founded an environmental group, Organization HOPE (Helping Out Prescott's Environment).

Painting barrels for litter containers and dragging out the bulk storage and unwanted materials off Kelly's Beach was as much weight as Lawn could pull until opportunity came knocking at her door. With no women on any committees or councils, she did not hesitate to break down barriers and accept an offer to join the planning board of the waterfront, now named the Sandra S. Lawn Harbour and Marina.

"I realized this is where you need to be if you want to make a difference," Lawn said.

Within no time, she found herself running for council alongside eight other men and ultimately topping the polls, surprising herself, but not others. Lawn's modesty showed as she described herself as a "homely" teenager, and Robert brought up the story of how they first met on Canada Day at Lake Simcoe.

"My eyes mustn't have been very good," he joked.

It was exactly a year after that first meeting when they tied the knot and began living a life together devoted to raising a tight-knit family, loving the place they called home, and inspir-



Sandra and Robert Lawn have devoted lifetimes of community involvement in and around the Prescott area.

ing others to get involved within the community.

Perhaps Lawn's most eye-opening experience was when Ontario's minister of health called upon her to head-up the mental health review for southeastern Ontario, and dedicate years of her time creating a report with a unique layout and organized format. After a student at South Grenville District High School committed suicide, Lawn's report was used by guidance counsellors to set the high school up with Connect Youth, a program providing ongoing support and outreach for today's youth.

"It was an unbelievable learning experience for

me," she said. "We're rescuing kids."

Today, in between tennis games, Aquafitness classes and afternoons spent gardening, Lawn is found in her office, which has shelves stacked with books, desks covered in busy to-do-lists and a computer full of her own photographs documenting her years of commitment to Prescott. The right side of the room is taken over by blueprints as she works on her new project of renovating and restoring the Prescott Journal buildings, describing herself as putting on a new hat - entrepreneur.

Eager to get themselves to this year's St. Lawrence

Shakespeare Festival, an event that they have donated thousands of dollars to throughout the years, Sandra and Robert do not miss a beat of Prescott's history and culture. As long as the two have a special place in their hearts for this town, they

will continue to be the heart of Prescott, but they do not plan on slowing down anytime soon.

"I'm still learning. Every day I learn something," Lawn said. "I intend to keep going until I can't go anymore, no matter what."