New student space at college driven by family’s donation

Christian family pledges $75,000 toward food-service seating area in trades training complex

Special to The Okanagan Sunday

Students at Okanagan College’s Kelowna campus will soon have a bright new gathering space thanks to a donation by a local family.

In memory of Frank Christian, his wife Barbara Christian, along with their children Randy, Lorinda and Liana, has pledged $75,000 to support a new food-service seating space in the trades training complex that is currently undergoing a major renovation and expansion along KLO Road.

When Randy and Lorinda heard about the need for expanded study and gathering spaces in the new trades complex, they knew they wanted to help build a space that would bring students together and foster a sense of community on campus. The family’s donation is also intended to recognize Frank and Barbara Christian’s contribution to the community, explains their son Randy.

“Having owned car and RV dealerships, obviously the automotive trade has played a big role in our family’s businesses,” he said. “So when we learned about the new trades complex and the opportunities it will provide for students, the focus aligned with our family’s history and our desire to give something back to the next generation.”

“This building will bring people here. It will energize students and provide them with a fantastic facility,” he added.

“Formal training is so important,” said Lorinda Christian. “Even if you are a natural mechanic or carpenter, you need that Red Seal to open up your horizons and take your career to the next level. We’re proud to support students’ futures in this way.”

“Every aspect of the new trades training complex — from accessibility to sustainability to technology — has been conceived to give students the best possible training experience,” said Jim Hamilton, president of Okanagan College. “We greatly appreciate the Christian family’s support in helping us grow to meet the demand for trades training in the region.”

The Christian family has owned various automotive dealerships in Kelowna, dating back to 1963 when Frank and Barbara moved their family from Vancouver and took over Kelowna’s Volkswagen dealership. They opened Parklane Lincoln Mercury in 1977, and Parklane RV in 1978. Parklane Acura followed in 1987. Though Frank retired in 2004, he continued to be actively involved in the business and the community until he died in 2007, noted his son.

“Our family has seen the value of trades training first-hand,” said Randy, whose son Kaseon completed the dual-credit program in electrical trades at Okanagan College. Lorinda’s son Ryley completed the first level of the welding program. The dual-credit programs are offered to students currently in high school who wish to take college-level courses while completing their high school education.

“This workforce needs to be filled,” said Randy. “The industry can’t find trained RV technicians fast enough right now. There is a huge shortage. That’s a guaranteed job.”

Slated to open in spring of 2018, the new trades training complex will feature state-of-the-art classroom and workshop spaces. The Okanagan College Foundation launched the Bright Horizons Building for Skills fundraising campaign in October of last year to raise the necessary $7 million to complete the project. The provincial government has committed $28 million.

To learn more about the campaign and opportunities to get involved, visit okanagan.bc.ca/campaign.

Photo contributed

Lorinda and Randy Christian's family is donating $75,000 to support a new food-service seating area in the trades training complex that is being renovated and expanded at Okanagan College’s Kelowna campus.