

Businessman Joe Shannon first inductee into Philanthropy Hall of Fame

PORT HAWKESBURY - Joe Shannon isn't one to look for accolades, although he understands why it's important to recognize achievement.

Businessman Joe Shannon will be the first inductee into the Cape Breton Philanthropy Hall of Fame.

It was his sharp business acumen and skill as a shrewd negotiator that led to his success in several sectors of the province's economy over the past five decades.

The humble truck driver who grew up in Sydney and has called the Port Hawkesbury area home for decades will be celebrated later this month as the first inductee into the Cape Breton Philanthropy Hall of Fame.

He hopes his recognition is a catalyst to start a conversation on the need to give back to one's own community.

"I'm just a truck driver living in Port Hawkesbury. That's all I do," he said modestly during a phone interview on Friday.

"It's important to do these things. It adds a lot not only to the community, and to the cause, but it gives people an opportunity to talk and network."

Shannon, 76, is president of Atlantic Corp. Ltd., a holding company for his chain of Shannex Health Care nursing homes and trucking company Seaboard Transport Group.

His reach also extends into the information technology, real estate and construction sectors. In all, Atlantic Corp., a privately held company, employs more than 5,000 people.

He's a recipient of the Order of Canada and has been inducted into the Canadian Business Hall of Fame.

It's his philanthropic endeavours, however, that make a lasting impact on the lives of those living in Cape Breton.

A former chair of the Cape Breton University board of governors in the 1990s, he's headed two fundraising campaigns for the university.

During the Future First campaign to build up CBU's scholarship endowment, Shannon led a group of volunteers in boosting the fund by \$8 million to provide more bursaries and scholarships for students.

In 2011, his family made a \$2-million contribution to the university's cornerstone campaign to build the business school, which bears his name.

“I think the school of business has generated a lot of revenue for the university from our international programs, and I think it’s attracting most of the international students and that’s great to have them here,” Shannon said.

He helped raise money toward the \$12-million project — \$8 million to support the Shannon School of Business building and \$4 million for the Purdy Crawford Chair in Aboriginal Business Studies.

In health care, he donated \$400,000 to aid the advancement of remote technology for emergency neurosurgical examinations in 2007.

The monetary donation allowed the QE II Foundation to purchase a remote presence neurosurgical robot to allow surgeons to more efficiently communicate with patients needing urgent care.

Philanthropy can be found at all levels, Shannon said, noting that it’s the community working together for a common purpose that people need to remember.

“If you want a new hospital, today, you’ve got to go out and pay for it; you want a new MRI machine you’ve got to pay part of the cost.

“You’ve got to collect the money and people like you and I contribute that money and get the job done.”

The Sydney and Area Chamber of Commerce has held the Cape Breton Business Hall of Fame ceremony since 2002 as a fundraiser for business scholarships at CBU.

A philanthropy component was added to the hall of fame this year to allow the business community to recognize contributions of individuals, organizations and other groups that don't fit the narrow definition originally outlined by the committee overseeing the nominations, according to the chamber’s executive director Adrian White.

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