

# Respected Oliphant resident passes

Submitted by Marjorie (McKenzie) Selman

When his two brothers and two sisters left their Oliphant home to make a living in southern Ontario cities, Murdoch Ross (Murdoch) McKenzie, who died last week at age 72 years of a heart condition, was the kid brother who stayed, and against all odds prospered.

At the time of his death, the prominent area businessman could look back on a life of business and political accomplishments created within the then small summer community of cottages. It was served by a lone grocery store, and dance pavilion, owned by his father, William A. McKenzie and his brother, Thomas, who also were commercial fishermen. They were sons of Oliphant pioneer farmer Murdoch McKenzie, of Scotland.

"Quite honestly," his sister, Marjorie (McKenzie) Selman, retired and living in Oliphant, said. "I suspect many summer folk thought that our stay-at-home brother was stuck for life in a dead end jack of all trades jobs as an ill-paid harbor master, combined with selling summer gasoline to motorists and boaters, delivering ice, and looking after cottages in the wintertime."

"Boy, were they wrong," she said. "But our family were always well aware of his ambition and his fearlessness in gambling on projects. He had left home briefly to work as a Great Lakes deckhand, but the urge to return home to independence was too strong."

Over time, with a keen entrepreneurial eye, Murdoch launched a marina with space



for 150 boats, a large boat storage business, Oliphant Oaks trailer park, and a year-round Bombardier Ski-Doo and Sea-Doo full service business and shop. Later, spotting the trend to new cottage building on the Fishing Islands offshore from Oliphant, he had built to his specifications an unsinkable steel barge, with two droppable stabilizing legs and a ramp permitting unloading in shallow island water. The barge was

capable of carrying heavy hauling and earth moving equipment, cement mixing trucks, building materials and septic tanks to and from the cottages under construction. It was pushed by a small iron boat and outboard engine most often steered by him.

His widow, the former Anne Hahn, Warton, said when she and Murdoch were married in 1958 their economic prospects might have appeared uncertain to some, but her husband convinced her that business opportunities were out there to live more than comfortably.

"We had a good life that included Caribbean cruise ship and other travels thanks to winning sales awards from Bombardier, lots of friends we met through business, and the final accomplishment, a beautiful house of peninsula quarried stone whose construction he carefully supervised. Not bad for a couple of stay-at-homes."

Brother Donald, retired and living in Oliphant, observed that in a sense Murdoch was born in the right place and right time. "During our parent's time, there'd been the Great Depression and then the Second World War. There was little commercial activity. Then came the more affluent generation that produced the baby boomers and year-round cottages and life styles.

"But, it was an opportunity for all to grasp, and it took Murdoch to see a trend, and act on it. There's a lesson there for young people today who complain they have to leave the area to get a job. Though, it is not all that simple. Murdoch worked long hours, with his sleeves rolled up, so to speak. He was very much a hands-on person."

He was interested in politics, and served briefly as an Amabel Township councillor. Municipal, national and global politics were a family discussion affair conducted at his parent's kitchen table. When his brother and sisters retired to Oliphant, these often heated discussions continued, Don said, with Murdoch's common sense cooling matters.

While both his parent lived into their nineties, it was speculated Murdoch's heart was damaged at age 21 when the mast of a sailboard he was taking out of storage hit an overhead electrical wire and the 6,900 volt impact knocked him unconscious. Recovering, he continued hard physical work, and sport. He hunted deer for many years at the then Moore Lake Hunt Camp, and later in the Cape Chin area.