

Call for nominations

The St. Jerome's Graduates' Association established the Father Norm Choate Distinguished Graduate Award to recognize graduates who have made outstanding contributions to their professions, their communities, or the Church.

To nominate a graduate for this distinction, please contact Harry Froklage, Director of Development and Graduate Affairs, for a nomination form. An electronic nomination form is also available. Please send e-mail to froklage@watarts.uwaterloo.ca or call (519) 884-8111, ext. 255.

The deadline for nominations is Friday, February 23, 2001.

Father Norm Choate (right), former president of St. Jerome's and now a parish priest in Florida, was on hand to present the Father Norm Choate Distinguished Graduate Award to Rob Donelson (left) on November 10, 2000.

Distinguished grad committed to making a difference

Each year, the St. Jerome's Graduates' Association recognizes a graduate who has made an outstanding contribution to his or her profession, community, or church. Rob Donelson, this year's recipient of the Father Norm Choate Distinguished Graduate Award, has distinguished himself in all three areas.

After graduating in 1981 with a degree in English and history, Donelson worked at Queen's Park for 10 months on an Ontario Legislature Internship. There, he gained a "fascinating exposure to our political system" which serves him well in his current position as executive director of the St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation in Kitchener.

Once he had completed his internship, Donelson returned to St. Jerome's where he served for 12 years as director of development and graduate affairs. Recognizing the need to extend St. Jerome's strong sense of community beyond campus, he was instrumental in establishing the Graduates' Association. During his tenure, Donelson also significantly developed scholarship and bursary funds at St. Jerome's.

Donelson's development work at St. Jerome's launched his career in professional fundraising. In 1994 he left the college to take his current post at St. Mary's General Hospital Foundation. He has served as president of the Canadian Association of Gift Planners (Waterloo-Wellington) and was honoured with the Outstanding Fundraising Executive Award from the Waterloo Region Fundraising Executives in 1995. Donelson has also served as chair of the Leave a Legacy Program and over the years has done volunteer work for Big Brothers, the Working Centre, the Canadian Catholic Organization for Development and Peace, the Kitchener-Conestoga Rotary Club, and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish.

Fellow St. Jerome's grad Stephanie Mancini of the Working Centre in Kitchener says, "Rob truly exemplifies the Christian service that St. Jerome's builds and encourages."

Terry Downey, a former recipient of the award and currently president of St. Mary's College in Alberta, describes Donelson as "a person of remarkable integrity, incredible energy, and dedication to the cause of Catholic education and health care."

When the award was presented to him at a ceremony in November, Donelson accepted it with characteristic modesty. "I am humbled to be included among the previous recipients, people whom I admire and respect, people who have been exemplars of the values St. Jerome's holds dear," he said, noting how pleased he was that former St. Jerome's president Father Norm Choate was on hand to make the presentation. "Tonight I am doubly honoured: I have been recognized by an institution which has played an integral part in my life, and the award is presented by its namesake, a person whom I consider to be a friend and mentor."

Donelson spoke fondly of his student years at St. Jerome's. "I was privileged to study with professors who were gifted and distinguished teachers, who took pride in their teaching and research. I benefitted from their ability to challenge me to strive for excellence and not to settle for anything less."

He singled out Doug Letson and Ted McGee as particularly inspirational teachers who spared no effort to bring out the best in their students. "I've since learned that Ted McGee brings a similar tenacity to the game of hockey, and on most Wednesday nights for the past several years, I've come to know, on more than one occasion, Ted's elbow. He plays hockey as hard as he marks."

But what Donelson learned at St. Jerome's goes beyond academics. "My understanding and experience of faith changed at St. Jerome's, as it should," he said. "I saw the human face of the church and had reinforced for me the notion that faith and action are inextricably linked and that it is our obligation to try to make a difference in our church and society."

Donelson, who is married to Dr. Theresa Donelson, an optometrist and Waterloo grad, is a firm believer in doing "what you can do when you can do it." An active and

involved father of five children, he has somehow found the time over the last year to take up distance running. So far, he has run several 10 kilometre races and two half marathons and one full one.

"I want to assure you that in accepting this award, I won't be allowed to let it go to my head—my kids will see to that," he assured the audience. "I recall that when I finished the marathon in September, the first thing one of my four-year-old twins said to me was 'What took you so long?'"

Photo: Ron Hewson

