



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Al Potvin Family Foundation established with \$1 million gift to aid youth in Mississippi Mills**

**MISSISSIPPI MILLS, ON – August 17<sup>th</sup>, 2021** – For decades Al Potvin has nurtured his riverfront property as a beloved community resource. He collected and composted mountains of autumn leaves, tended walking paths, established a renowned sunflower garden, held winter solstice bonfires and initiated a tree sale program that saw over 8,000 trees planted. Now in his mid-80s, he's decided to sell 17 acres and donate \$1 million to the Al Potvin Family Foundation. The new foundation's interests are in the areas of educational opportunity and non-judgemental support for local children and youth.

The foundation offers three specific grant categories. Academic tutoring and counselling categories are priorities. The third category is called life opportunities. Academic tutoring grants will cover the cost of private tutoring, tutoring centres and virtual lessons. Counselling grants cover mental health support including talk therapy, speech therapy, play music or art therapy, or grief, guidance and career counselling. Life opportunities grants will cover joining sports groups and/or buying sports equipment, music lessons and/or instruments, travel opportunities, technology support for schoolwork, community service initiatives and career planning.

The Al Potvin Family Foundation has partnered with the Champions for Kids Foundation, a charity created by the Upper Canada District School Board (UCDSB), to distribute the grants. Champions 4 Kids provides support to underprivileged students that have been identified by school principals in UCDSB. Grants from the Al Potvin Family Foundation will be available through the Champions for Kids to underprivileged youth attending UCDSB schools in the Municipality of Mississippi Mills.

Potvin has found ways to positively impact the lives of youth for decades. "I have lived in Mississippi Mills for 60 years," said Potvin. "The people, landscape and culture of this community have helped shape my life. My first wife Barb and I raised our four children here, and Barb and I founded Hilan Play Structures here to build outdoor play structures for kids. All four of our children worked for Hilan at one point or another. I fondly remember the many, many people in our community that worked for our company. Hilan would not have succeeded without them. Together we built over 1,000 play structures for

children in communities across North America. ‘Our Work is Child’s Play’ was our motto, and I am grateful for the success that Barb and I had.”

In the 1980s, the Potvin’s purchased their property on the edge of Almonte and built a house there. The property runs North along the Mississippi River from Carss Street. Much of Potvin’s energy in retirement was dedicated to maintaining and beautifying the land, and he always invited people to enjoy it with his family – from dog walkers on the paths to local kids fishing the river off the shore.

Barb passed away in 2008. Al remarried in 2013 to Shirley Fulton-Deugo. She is the fourth-generation co-owner of Fulton’s Pancake House and Sugar Bush in nearby Pakenham. Al is deeply grateful to Shirley for her support in creating the Al Potvin Family Foundation. Al is also very grateful to his three children Chris, Janice and Paul who will be the Directors of the Foundation.

Knowing that development of the riverfront property was inevitable given Almonte’s projected growth for residential housing, Potvin decided to find a way to sell the land and fund a foundation to support local youth. He and Fulton-Deugo didn’t know how to do that operationally, so they turned to another local community leader who did.

Tom Affleck is a not-for-profit business and project management advisor who founded the SchoolBOX charity in 2006. In 2016, Affleck’s work with SchoolBOX earned him the Meritorious Service Cross (M.S.C.) Civil Division from the Right Honourable David Johnston, Governor General of Canada, at a ceremony in Rideau Hall. SchoolBOX is a grassroots, volunteer-driven charity that has built over 115 school classrooms for impoverished communities in Central America, as well as a number of libraries / learning centers for first nations communities in Northern Ontario.

Along with his wife Sarah Kerr, who is now Executive Director of SchoolBOX, Affleck has carefully advised Potvin and Fulton-Deugo on the Al Potvin Family Foundation’s mission, vision and objectives. Based on his work leading physical renewal of Knox Presbyterian Church in Toronto, which involves a \$14 million dollar restoration of the main Church building and approximately 120,000 sq ft of new residential development, Affleck also assisted with the sale of Potvin’s land to a builder who is committed to developing the parcel of land in a way that respects Al’s wishes.

Those wishes include continued public access to the riverfront, community green space and gardens, a children’s play structure, creative built form and a mix of unit types that fosters inter-generational living. At the suggestion of the developer, the new community will be called Hilan Village after the play structure company founded by Al and Barb.

“My hope is that the new housing development will provide a new and inspiring model for land development in the Ottawa Valley,” stated Potvin.

‘It was such an honour to support Al with this project. I am deeply grateful that we successfully met his objectives, ensuring that his land was developed in a way that respected his values, while at the same time creating and funding a foundation that serves the youth of Mississippi Mills,’ stated Affleck. “The result is a multi-faceted legacy that is entirely keeping with how Al conducted himself in our community.”

Friends and neighbours are invited to attend a celebration to thank Al for creating the Al Potvin Family Foundation on Sunday, August 29<sup>th</sup> from 1pm – 4pm at 38 Carss Street, Almonte. Light refreshments will be provided, and the event will be held outdoors.

### **NOTES TO MEDIA:**

Al Potvin is available for phone or live in-camera interview with his wife Shirley Deugo-Fulton on Tues., August 17<sup>th</sup> from 2pm-4pm, and Friday, August 20<sup>th</sup> from 1pm-4pm. Please note that Al Potvin is in his mid-80s and has Parkinson’s disease, so his wife Shirley will support him during interviews. Tom Affleck will also be supporting Al.

TV and web editors can also find an interview with Potvin at the YouTube documentary found <https://alpotvinfamilyfoundation.com> The documentary contains scenes and descriptions of the property he is gifting to create the Al Potvin Family Foundation, and an overview of the foundation’s objectives.

Attached is a photo of Potvin.

### **MEDIA CONTACTS:**

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An open letter from Al Potvin to the community of Mississippi Mills can be found below:

Dear Friends and Neighbours,

I have lived in Almonte for 60 years. The people, landscape and culture of Mississippi Mills have helped to shape my life. My first wife Barb and I raised our 4 children in the Friendly Town. I consider myself very blessed to call this wonderful community home.

Barb and I founded Hilan Play Structures in Mississippi Mills to build outdoor play structures for kids. All four of our children worked for Hilan at one point or another. I fondly remember the many, many people in our community that worked for our company. Hilan would not have succeeded without them. Together we built over 1000 play structures for communities across North America. 'Our Work is Child's Play' was our moto, and I am grateful for the success that Barb and I had.

In the 1980's, Barb and I were fortunate to purchase a farm property on the edge of Almonte. The 20+ acres ran North along the Mississippi River from Carss Street. Much of my energy in retirement was dedicated to maintaining and beautifying this property. I very much enjoyed sharing the land with the wider community; having a community compost pile, hosting a winter solstice bonfire gathering, having a sunflower walkway and allowing the wider community to walk the property with their four-legged friends.

I am now in my mid-80s. Memories of my life, work and community involvement in Mississippi Mills are very special to me. I want my estate to give back to this community, which has given my family and I so much. As a result, I have arranged to sell the bulk of my property at 38 Carss Street to a local developer. The proceeds of this sale will be used to create a foundation in my family's name that will provide funds for youth in Mississippi Mills to access tutoring, therapy and important life opportunities. My hope is that the Al Potvin Family Foundation will help to empower the kids and youth of Mississippi Mills to reach their potential.

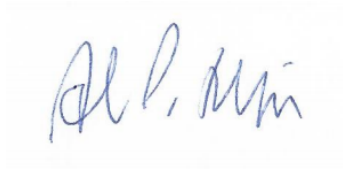
**I invite you to consider donating to the Foundation by visiting [www.alpotvinfamilyfoundation.com](http://www.alpotvinfamilyfoundation.com) Our youth are our future, and I do hope that you will join me in supporting them in this way.**

The land will be developed in a way that respects my wishes, including public access to the river front, community green space and gardens, a children's play structure, creative built form and a mix of unit types that fosters inter-generational living. At the suggestion of the purchaser, the development will be called Hilan Village. My hope is that this development will provide a new and inspiring model for land development in the Ottawa Valley.

I would like to thank my wife Shirley Deugo for supporting me in creating the Al Potvin Family Foundation. I would also like to thank my three children Chris, Janice and Paul for being the directors of the Foundation. Finally, I would like to thank Tom Affleck, who's leadership and faithfulness helped to bring my legacy vision to life.

I am grateful to be able to serve the community of Mississippi Mills in this way.

With appreciation,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Al Potvin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first part "Al" is written with a large, looped 'A' and a small 'l'. The second part "Potvin" is written with a large 'P', followed by 'o', 't', 'v', 'i', and 'n' in a connected script.

Al Potvin