

Gaylord and Edwina Madill: Community Builders

Gaylord: born 1936, Vermilion, AB

Edwina: born 1940, Calgary, AB

Gaylord had a small-town upbringing in Vermilion with his five siblings. After high school he spent a few years working on the oil rigs and in the far North.

He also went to university, getting his B.A. and then an education certificate. Upon graduation he became a distance education teacher, a job he did for 32 years until his retirement in 1997.

In the early 1960s, while studying at the University of Alberta and then teaching, he lived in a rooming house near the campus. The woman who ran the Messier rooming house gave her tenants hearty meals and a warm environment. That woman was Mark Messier's grandmother. Gaylord became an 'adopted' member of the family and knew little Mark when the famous hockey player was a toddler.



In 1964, through a mutual friend, Gaylord met Edwina, who had recently moved to Edmonton for a nursing job at the U of A Hospital. The next year they were married.

Edwina grew up in Black Diamond with her parents, her twin sister and a younger sister. After high school she worked in various jobs before going to nursing school in Calgary in 1961. It was a profession that suited her; she got the Gold proficiency medal when graduating an RN. Edwina would nurse for 47 years, until age 70.

The newlyweds lived downtown for several years, taking six months off work in 1967 to travel in Europe and the Middle East. In 1970 daughter Stephanie was born, followed by Craig in 1974. Today Stephanie is a faculty member at the University of Saskatchewan; Craig is an Edmonton lawyer.

Early on, the Madills made two big commitments that proved to be life-long. They joined the Unitarian Church of Edmonton, and they moved into a housing co-operative.

Gaylord started attending Unitarian services before he met Edwina, intrigued by reports of the social action commitment of this church. He had long since abandoned the evangelical religion of his parents; he found Unitarianism a good fit. Edwina, raised by Presbyterian parents, would find the same thing. The couple have been active church members for half a century.

It was Gaylord who was first drawn to a group planning a co-operative housing development. The Madills made a \$1,000 commitment to the project, and in 1974 moved into their new townhouse in the 50-unit Keegano co-op in Mill Woods. They have been very active co-op members over the years, and today are one of a small handful of original residents.

In their co-op home they raised their kids and provided a home to a series of overseas exchange students.

At UCE both Madills volunteered in the booming Religious Education program of the 1970s and 1980s. Edwina was especially active in RE. They formed close friendships with other couples at the church. Gaylord served on the church board.

Their commitment continues today. Edwina has been church teller for six years, a job that requires attendance at pretty well every church service. Gaylord is one of the main building repair volunteers for the church; there's rarely a week that he isn't there working on some problem.

The Madills have had time for many other things in their busy lives, like travel and charities, Gaylord's extensive research interests, politics, support of the arts through opera and ballet, along with Edwina's weekly volunteer efforts at an inner city school. Five years ago Edwina took up ballet as an exercise supplement to her yoga classes.

They have seen lots of change at UCE, not all of it for the better. But they know that change happens, whether you like it or not.

"The church has been a real anchor for us over the years," says Edwina.

■ Interviewed Sept. 1, 2015 by Susan Ruttan

