Celebrating a special Community Builder

Every community has citizens who spend their lifetimes making their community a better place to live.

They care about their neighbours and the quality of life and opportunities available now and for future generations.

They have helped build and grow their communities into the beautiful and supportive places we live in today and want to leave the community strong for those who follow.

In this way, these citizens are doing very much what the Battle River Community Foundation is doing: providing strong and healthy environments for children; being flexible and positive in helping the community grow; and offering help to those facing a difficult time.

To highlight the importance of strengthening community life, the Battle River Community Foundation has begun a series of Community Builders' Dinners to honour the people who characterize the values we hold dear and to build endowment funds in their names that will continue to strengthen the local communities forever.

Bitz O'Riordan

The fifth such Community Builders' Dinner to take place in Camrose will be held on Friday, October 17, at the Norsemen Inn, celebrating the contributions of Bitz O'Riordan. Everyone is invited to join in recognizing Bitz for all the ways in which he has made the Camrose area a better, stronger community. The program after dinner will include tributes from friends and family, such as Police Chief Darrell Kambeitz, Reno Gauthier, Lyle Hoffman and son Fred, as well as a musical tribute by Bev Munro. The MC will be Frank Reid. There will also be a live auction, with guest auctioneer, Laurie Lindstrand.

Honouring Bitz O'Riordan
Friday, October 17
Norsemen Inn, Camrose

Tickets are available from any Battle River Community Foundation Board member. Their names and phone numbers are listed on page 4.

Tickets are $480 for a table of 8 or $60 each, which includes a donation of $30 per ticket to the Bitz O'Riordan Fund.

Local transport owner helps keep the community moving

As residents of east central Alberta, we're used to seeing Hi-Way 13 Transport trucks on the road every day, moving goods from one part of the province to another.

But what we don't see from the outside is the dedication and commitment that makes the company strong. That dedication is led by company owner Fred (Bitz) O'Riordan, a long-time resident of Camrose.

Bitz has been transporting goods since he was a teenager, first taking time off school to swamp for the Shermak Brothers, loading coal at the mine site that is now the Camrose Ski Hill. After that Bitz worked with a fellow from Bittern Lake to haul the sand that a local company used to mix cement. Their mode of transport was a horse and wagon.

When he got a driver's license, Bitz helped his older brother Bob transport supplies from Edmonton to the Army training facility that was located in Camrose. When Bob became a truck dealership owner, Bitz took on Bob's transfer customers, hauling fruit, eggs and more.

In the late 1940s, Bitz and John Keen became

Bitz (second from right, back row) was one of nine children.

Bitz and his brother Tom.

partners in a business called Camrose Transfer. When John moved north shortly after, Bitz carried on the business alone for a few years.

In 1957 Bitz, his brother Tom and Vern Kruse founded Hi-Way 13 Transport. Vern sold out in 1960 and the brothers carried on together until Tom passed away in the 1990s.

Born in the local area, in 1924, Fred (Bitz) is the fourth son of Fred and Minnie O'Riordan. His father was a warehouse worker in Camrose and his mother tended the couple's nine children.

As a "middle child" Bitz always had brothers and sisters around. But it was his first employer who gave him what was to become a life-long nickname – indeed the only name by which most people know him.

According to the story, whenever the Shermak Brothers had a job for young Fred they would ask him how much he wanted to be paid in order to get it done. The answer was always two-bits. They began calling him "Two-bits" which eventually got shortened to "Bitz" and a new name was born.

Over the years of business ownership, Bitz also married his wife Dorothy and raised six children: Fred, Kerry, Robert, Michael, Deborah and Tracey. Dorothy passed away several years ago after battling MS. Now himself age 84, Bitz has passed ownership

and the day to day leadership of the business to four of his children. But his lifelong sense of community support has never changed.

"The thing about Dad," says son Fred, now president of Hi-Way 13 Transport, "is that he'll never tell you all the great things he's done. He does a lot of things but he's never very public about them. He just thinks helping people is the right thing to do."

That assistance includes members of his family, of course, as well as his employees. It also stretches to include the community.

The example of Orville Driedger quickly comes to mind when speaking of Bitz's kindness and compassion for helping others.

Orville was a mentally challenged man looking for work in 1948, at a time when our society wasn't yet comfortable with the idea of mentally handicapped people being visible in the community. Bitz hired Orville to run in with bills of lading for customers' signatures while drivers were loading trucks. Orville also assisted with other duties and remained an appreciated, respected employee for nearly 50 years, until the time of his death in 1998.

Far right, Bitz once went to 'jail' to raise funds for a local charity.

Other examples of Bitz's personal level of support for the community, as well as all the ways in which Hi-Way 13 supports community projects, are not hard to find.

"He was instrumental in developing the partnership between Centra Cam and the pipe mill for construction of

Bitz and Dorothy on their wedding day.

wood bunks," recalls his long-time employee Glen Winder. "And he's always been a big supporter of other charities, too."

Sometimes the support comes in the form of monetary donations and sometimes the support is in the form of transportation. Hi-Way 13 trucks are often used to carry goods for events. "If someone needed a load of goods hauled to the site of an event, Dad always made time to do that," says Fred. "I can't count the number of times or events he's supported that way. It's always been important to Dad, and to our business, to be part of the community in any way we can."

That sense of supporting the community is what the Battle River Community Foundation, and all of Bitz's many friends, family and co-workers, are looking forward to celebrating at the annual Community Builders' Tribute Dinner on Friday, October 17.

Free on bail!

About the Foundation

The Battle River Community Foundation was established in 1995 by a group of volunteers who were interested in creating a means of supporting the local area for years to come.

The Foundation is considered to be a unique organization in the local area because it exists strictly to support projects in east central Alberta. It can "fill in the gaps" and provide support to programs that are not funded by government but are essential to helping our local communities grow toward a healthy future.

The generosity of local donors is what makes the Battle River Community Foundation work. Investing in the Foundation is like investing in a community savings account that will be there to help when there's a need.

The Battle River Community Foundation offers the opportunity for donors to give financial gifts of significant size that will remain intact, with the interest being used annually to enhance the area, in which we all live and work. Donors can give their funds to a general endowment fund; name a fund in honour of themselves or a loved one; create a fund that allows them to have input into the allocation of interest each year or even designate their gift in support of a particular cause.

Since its inception the assets of the Battle River Community Foundation have grown to more than $4.6 million, in a variety of funds. More than $800,000 has been given back to communities throughout east central Alberta. In 2007 alone, $224,024 was given to different community organizations, to support projects as diverse as music and fine arts; minor sports; youth leadership; community fire departments; parks, playgrounds and cemeteries; handicapped access to public buildings, upgrades to campgrounds and more.

Applications are currently being accepted for the 2008 grants.

No other local agency can provide the range of support that the Battle River Community Foundation can. Each year the assets of the Battle River Community Foundation grow and make it an even more significant source of funds for projects in the local area. To find out more about establishing a fund, so that you too can be part of "giving back," contact any one of the Foundation board members listed here or talk to your own financial advisor.

❑ As part of our tribute to Bitz O'Riordan, we wish to make a gift of

❑ $2,500   ❑ $1,000   ❑ $500
❑ $250   ❑ $100   ❑ Other _____

to be permanently invested in the Bitz O'Riordan Fund

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Phone _____

Please mail to Battle River Community Foundation,
Box 1122, Camrose, AB T4V 4E7, or see any of the board members