



Drayton Festival Theatre Announces Legacy Gift from Ab & Bonnie Hesselink to Support Lobby Renovations

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DRAYTON, ON – Drayton Entertainment is proud to announce a significant legacy gift from longtime community champions **Ab and Bonnie Hesselink**, supporting major lobby renovations at the historic Drayton Festival Theatre. In recognition of their contribution, the revitalized space will be named the **Hesselink Family Lounge**.

This investment will expand the theatre’s usable footprint, ease congestion, improve traffic flow, increase accessibility, and create a more welcoming, flexible gathering space for audiences and community groups alike.

The naming of the **Hesselink Family Lounge** honours a story deeply woven into the fabric of Drayton’s cultural and civic life. For **Ab Hesselink**, the Drayton Town Hall — now home to the Drayton Festival Theatre for the past 35 years — has always been more than a building. It has been a cornerstone of community, service, and shared experience.

In the early 1950s, newly arrived Dutch immigrant families gathered in the former Town Hall space to worship. From 1953 to 1957, a young Ab attended services here with his parents, forming some of his earliest memories of belonging. As a child, he returned each year for the magic of the Santa Claus parade, which ended at the Town Hall with films and treats for local families.

That same building would later become the backdrop for a remarkable public life. At just 22, Ab was elected to Drayton Council — the youngest in its history — serving for 21 years and leading numerous successful community projects. The Town Hall also housed the fire department, where Ab volunteered for 37 years, demonstrating unwavering commitment and courage.

In 1983, recognizing the importance of preserving this vital community space, Ab and a group of citizens in the community led a grassroots effort to revitalize the Town Hall as a social and cultural centre. Through determination, fundraising, and community support, the project was completed. The following year, Ab helped bring new life to the space by securing sponsors and inviting performing groups to Drayton.

Bonnie shared that same spirit of community performance, taking to the stage in the 1980s with the local community players and contributing her own talent to Drayton’s growing cultural scene.

That foundation paved the way for something extraordinary. In 1990, under the leadership of Alex Mustakas, a bold proposal was made to bring professional theatre to Drayton. From that vision, the Drayton Festival Theatre was born. As an original board member, Ab played a critical role in ensuring financial stability and safeguarding community interests. Today, more than three decades later and with 7 stages to its credit, Drayton Entertainment has become one of the largest professional theatre companies in the country — and Ab continues to serve on its Board of Directors.

“This legacy gift from Ab and Bonnie is a reflection of a lifetime of service, leadership, and belief in the power of community and the arts,” says **Alex Mustakas**, Founder & CEO of Drayton Entertainment. “Their story is inseparable from the story of this building, this theatre, and this town. We are honoured to recognize their enduring legacy.”

“This building has been part of my life for as long as I can remember,” says **Ab Hesselink**. “It has served so many purposes for so many people — a place of worship, celebration, service, and the arts. Bonnie and I are grateful for the opportunity to help ensure it continues to bring people together for generations to come.”

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