

Housing project gets \$5M

YWCA 'thrilled' with donation from estates of Thomson, sister for new women's complex

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It's a story of riches to rags.

The historic site of the House of Industry, the city's former poorhouse, will keep its façade but get a new lift in an \$80 million affordable housing project, thanks in part to a \$5 million gift from late billionaire businessman Ken Thomson and his sister, Audrey Campbell.

The donation was given from their estates to honour the memory of their sister, Irma Brydson, who predeceased them in 1966.

"According to our research it's believed to be the largest gift to a social service organization in Canada," said Heather McGregor, CEO of the YWCA. "We're completely thrilled."

"Philanthropy has an important role in addressing the root causes of poverty and homelessness and needs to be a top priority, especially in tough economic times," Sherry Brydson, the daughter of Irma Brydson, said in



MICHAEL STUPARYK/TORONTO STAR

The YWCA Elm Centre, which will feature 300 affordable apartments for women and families, will be built on the site of city's former poorhouse.

A HISTORY OF GIVING

Phyllis Audrey Thomson was born in Toronto on July 6, 1917 (died Sept. 23, 2007), the eldest child of Roy and Edna Thomson. Her sister, Irma (later Brydson), was born in 1918 (died May 2, 1966), and her brother, Kenneth, in 1923 (died June 2006).

a press release.

As a child of the Depression, Irma had compassion for those less fortunate, as she saw her mother giving food to the poor who would come to their family home.

During their lives, Ken Thomson and Audrey Campbell wanted "to do something to honour their sister Irma Brydson," McGregor said.

They had discussed the matter with Sherry Brydson

"Sherry is a friend of the YWCA," McGregor said. "She was aware of our project and she brought the project forward to the family."

Not only was Irma Brydson born "a stone's throw away," from the site, but the Elmwood Spa, which Sherry began, was originally built by the YWCA in 1890, McGregor said.

"Sherry has always been supportive to the YWCA ... she has been a pioneer in the Elm St. business community."

The main, 17-storey tower at 87 Elm St. – to be named Irma Brydson Place – will have 300 units of affordable and supportive housing. The complex, to be known as the YWCA Elm Centre, will occupy a city block bordered by Elm, Elizabeth, Edward and Chestnut Sts., a block north of Dundas St., between Bay St. and University Ave.

The site is slated to include three buildings with 150 affordable units for women and women with children; 100 units for women "with serious mental health issues," and 50 units for aboriginal families.

Construction is estimated to take two years, McGregor said.

The YWCA will partner with Wigwamen Inc.,

2009 The YWCA receives a record-breaking \$5 million gift from the estates of the late Ken Thomson and Audrey (Thomson) Campbell in memory of their sister Irma Brydson. A 17-storey tower on Toronto's Elm St. will be named Irma Brydson Place.

2004 Ken Thomson and Audrey Campbell donate \$250,000 to North Bay General Hospital Foundation in recognition of Irma Brydson. Their father, Roy Thomson, started a newspaper company in Northern Ontario in the 1930s that grew to be one of the largest newspaper businesses in the world.

2004 Audrey Campbell and daughters donate \$25 million to the Institute for Breast Cancer Research at Toronto's Princess Margaret Hospital. It is named the Campbell Family Institute for Breast Cancer Research.

Compiled by Kathleen

which helps develop affordable housing for the aboriginal community, and the Jean Tweed Centre, which works with women's addictions.

*Power, Star library.
Sources: North Bay
General Hospital, Star
files*