

# Michael Barnstijn and Louise MacCallum



If you have walked the trail along the Grand River or hiked through the beautiful nature preserve in the Blair area known as “rare”, you have been touched by the generosity of Michael Barnstijn and Louise MacCallum.

Barnstijn and MacCallum are a new breed of local philanthropists who, while still young, are donating their wealth in ways that make the community a better place.

Both of them made their fortunes as software developers at Research In Motion (RIM), the Waterloo company that gave the world the Blackberry, the very successful e-mail device. Barnstijn teamed up with Mike Lazaridis and Doug Fregin in the mid-1980s to start RIM, and MacCallum joined the company later.

Barnstijn and MacCallum decided to retire in 1998 and devote their energy to donating money to a variety of causes including the arts, the environment and education. The young couple could have done anything with their professional success. When asked why they chose their particular path, Barnstijn said, “The simple answer is because we can.”

Shortly after retiring, Barnstijn and MacCallum donated an amazing \$13 million to local charities in 2000. Most of the money was used to set up the Musagetes Fund through the Kitchener-Waterloo Community Foundation. The fund contributes to smaller arts and cultural projects in Waterloo Region. Musagetes is a classical reference to Apollo, god of music and poetry and leader of the nine Muses.

When the Kitchener-Waterloo Art Gallery received \$340,000 from the Musagetes Fund in 2004, the gallery’s executive director Alf Bugosky was overjoyed. “This is a most generous and wonderful gift from two wonderful and supportive community spirited people.”

Grants from the Musagetes Fund have gone to both new and established cultural organizations; everything from the Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery to the Galt Horticultural Society to the Kitchener-Waterloo Philharmonic Choir and the K-W Multicultural Centre.

MacCallum and Barnstijn were two of the biggest supporters of the Waterloo Regional Children’s Museum in downtown Kitchener. They launched the museum’s capital fund in 2000 with a \$1 million gift. Two years later they contributed \$4 million more.

The couple also donated \$2.5 million for the library in the University of Waterloo’s new School of Architecture in Cambridge. Through the Musagetes Fund they were able to

donate \$1.3 million for a walking bridge across the Grand River in south Kitchener. The bridge is part of the 76-kilometre riverside Walter Bean Trail that runs from Waterloo through Kitchener to Cambridge.

They felt the trail donation complemented their support of “rare”, a 913-acre green space in the Blair area of Cambridge. The ecological reserve was once known as the Cruickston Charitable Research Reserve.

“We are thrilled our fund is already making a difference in our community and we are hopeful it will challenge others to explore this idea of leaving an everlasting legacy at whatever size their income will allow,” Michael Barnstijn said once. “Legacy is within reach for us all.”

*Photo courtesy of Michael Barnstijn and Louise MacCallum.*