

Forty-five years ago, on October 16, 1964, at the Opening of the Mendel Art Gallery, Founder Fred Mendel promised, "This beautiful creation of an Art Gallery and Conservatory combined in one unique building will be one of the most beautiful spots of the world; it cannot be created again. I assure you, for all time, this centre will be good."

The following is a letter from Chip Mitchell, grandson of Fred Mendel, to commemorate the 45th Birthday of the opening of the Mendel Art Gallery

### **A 45th Anniversary Message about the Mendel Art Gallery by Chip Mitchell**

It is hard to believe that the Mendel Art Gallery will be turning 45 years old Friday October 16th. As Fred Mendel's youngest Grandson, I remember with pride being at it's official opening with my sister Camille when I was a teenager. Saskatoon finally gave birth to it's own Civic Gallery thanks largely to the vision of my grandfather, Fred Mendel, who years earlier had barely escaped the Nazi holocaust and in gratitude to his adopted country donated not only the money but the Crown Jewels of his "Group of Seven" Collection. With the help of the Governments of Canada and the Province in matching equally his financial largesse, the City rose to the occasion by providing arguably the most beautiful park like riverfront setting of any Gallery in Canada, which was to be the Mendel Art Gallery's permanent site, housed in the most stunning example of Mid-Century Architecture, the envy of any Gallery in Canada. Sound like a Fairy Tale?; it truly was! "The Mendel" has achieved a national reputation that puts it among the most prestigious Museums in Canada. For the 40th Anniversary of "The Mendel", Saskatoon's community gathered to witness a major milestone as then Director Terry Graff unveiled stunning updated architectural plans ensuring the sanctity and continuity of "The Mendel" over the next 30 to 40 years assuring Fred Mendel's words at the opening 40 years earlier "I assure you for all time this Centre will be good."

Now for the bad.... October 16th, 2009 marks the 45th anniversary and it is being virtually ignored. It is very hard to make sense of what has transpired over this past year. The City stated in it's 2009 capital budget that "The Mendel's" ten-year capital plan addresses both the existing facility needs and the required capacity to see it through the next 30 to 40 years of operation;. Mayor Don Atchison and Mendel Board Chair Art Knight stated in a letter dated January 8, 2009 that the expansion and renovation of the Mendel Art Gallery is a "worthy and important project" that "will be successful". Out of nowhere everything changed April 3rd, the expansion and renovation of "The Mendel" was utterly abandoned, the Museum to

be stripped of its name, and somehow suddenly "The Mendel" had outgrown its planned renovation and the entire facility needed to be moved to River Landing and re-named, perhaps by the highest commercial bidder???

This nightmare has come true. It is certain that a 45 year historical bond and trust between Fred Mendel and his family, The City of Saskatoon and her Citizens, has been irreverently destroyed by the current Mayor and Board without any prior consultation of or consideration for the Citizens of Saskatoon or the Mendel Family. In trying to reconcile this action I have searched and spoken with many people in Cities across Canada, the US and even Europe but have found no precedence and have only been greeted with anger and outrage that such an action could come to pass. Most people have remarked that it defiles the very foundation by which any gifting, trust or legacy is bequeathed to an Institution, City, or even a Nation. They have all re-marked that if this sort of action can take place that it sets a dangerous precedent and that there is no reason to donate, bequeath or even trust that any institution or government will honour the sacred bond that it is charged with when any such donation or gifting is made. So now it is up to the Citizens of Saskatoon to judge and react to what is happening here. There has been a very special and longstanding relationship between "The Mendel" and the Community of Saskatoon at large. In fact "The Mendel" has been the most significant cultural factor the City has had for nearly half a Century. That's quite awhile if you consider the fact that Saskatoon has only been a City for about 100 years. Are we in such a rush to throw this wonderful part of our heritage away? It is not hard for me to understand why the 45th anniversary is being ignored by our current Civic Government. What may be hardest to understand is if the spirit that is "The Mendel" were abandoned by those Citizens and Countrymen alike who have loved and cherished her so much for nearly a half a century.

Chip Mitchell