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## **The “FR” in CFRA**

Frank Ryan’s name was synonymous with his beloved Ottawa Valley. His initials are permanently linked to the radio station he founded which went on the air for the first time 63 years ago this May. He was a successful businessman, a gentleman farmer and a born showman. His tangible legacy is evident throughout Canada’s capital.

A generous benefactor, Algonquin College of Applied Arts & Technology is located on land that was one of his prime properties. The housing and commercial



area adjacent is known as *Ryan Farm* and its recreational area as *Ryan Farm Park*. To the west, north of Baseline Road is another parkland location named in his honour as *Frank Ryan Park*. This former agricultural site also includes *Kilreen Park*. East of Merivale Road on Chesterton Drive, *Frank Ryan Senior Elementary School* was built on land that was donated by the Ryans to the Ottawa Catholic District School Board. As an avid supporter of harness racing, his own horses ran under the banner of his Kilreen stable. The most prestigious race

that takes place at Rideau Carleton Raceway is the *Annual Frank Ryan Memorial Trot*.

A proud valley boy, born in Arnprior, he was a graduate of Queen’s University in economics and helped in the development of their campus radio station. His early career was in advertising, which took him to Toronto and Winnipeg before he returned to Ottawa where he worked for the Federal government at the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. His wife, Kathleen, who was born in Renfrew, was also a Queen’s economics graduate. In loving deference he always called her “his better half”. Her sister, Charlotte Whitton, likewise was a Queen’s grad and the redoubtable four term mayor of Ottawa. Their family political discussions must have been intense as the Ryans were Liberal supporters and Dr. Whitton was a lifelong Tory. All three were generous supporters of their alma mater. Mr. Ryan and his sister-in-law were unsuccessful candidates in a well remembered mayoralty contest that was won by a third candidate, the well-known businessman, Don Reid. Two west end Ottawa streets were later named by the city as ‘Ryan’ and ‘Kay’ in honour of the Ryans.

In all of his endeavours the founding and implementation of his own radio station was his greatest triumph. In 1945 he was granted a broadcast licence; two years later after assembling an impressive staff of broadcasters, his own radio station went “on the air”. Always the intrepid promoter he hired the famous Percy Faith Orchestra for the station’s opening night broadcast from the old hockey arena, *The Auditorium*. The company’s first studios were located on the second floor of that former Ottawa landmark.

CFRA’s original dial location was at 560 with a power of 5000 watts. I wonder how many of our readers remember the introduction to CFRA’s popular supertime ‘sportscast’ -- “It’s 560 on your dial, 560 on your clock, the time and place for ‘Sports at Six’”. The original members of the “on-air” staff were a diverse and talented group including: Tom Foley, Terry Kielty, Fred Davis, Cam McDonald and Les Lye. At the time I joined the company in 1954, among my early co-workers were: Ernie Calcutt, Lowell Green, Jim Marino and our “morning men”, Ken “The General” Grant and before him, “Sunny” Jim Terrel.

When Tom Foley (whose wife, Chris, predeceased him) was killed in a Toronto airport limousine accident, the Ryans (who had no children) became the four Foley daughters’ surrogate grandparents.

As a knowledgeable rural broadcaster Mr. Ryan’s noon-hour *Farmers’ Notebook* was a must-listen program throughout the Ottawa Valley. As an entrepreneur he launched both Mac Beattie’s *Melodiers* and Ken Reynolds’ *Happy Wanderers*. He was a visionary and an early supporter of FM radio. His reputation and track record were rewarded with one of Canada’s earliest FM frequencies at 93.9, my old CFMO station. Earlier he was successful in upping the power of CFRA to 50,000 watts with a slight dial adjustment to the now familiar 580.

Mr. Ryan’s largesse included his thoughtful gift of a Canada Savings Bond to the newly born children of his staff. With my family of seven I put quite a strain on the station balancing its books. He also set up a most thoughtful profit sharing plan for his long-serving employees. His commitment to public service and community involvement included his devotion to the Maxville Highland Games and to the 30<sup>th</sup> Regiment Field Artillery who bestowed on him the rank of *Honorary Colonel*. One of his proudest moments was being inducted into the Ottawa Valley Country Music Hall of Fame as a builder, specifically for his ongoing support for the traditional music of the Valley.

Frank Ryan was sixty-four at the time of his sudden death in 1965. His devoted wife, Kathleen, died 30 years later in 1995. She was eighty-nine.