

## TOM OWENS

*The following is a version of a piece Bill Figel '72 wrote when Tom Owens was named recipient of the Leo Lions Legacy Award last year. A member of Leo's Class of 1954 and a generous, longtime supporter of the school, Tom died on Sept. 29, 2019.*

When Angela Hicks hears Tom Owens' name, her voice rises three octaves. Hicks, the Executive Director of Margaret's Village, holds the "Owens" name in reverence for the quiet work The Owens Foundation does in providing resources for the South Side homeless shelter and the families in transition it serves.

It's by his own choosing that Tom Owens deflects attention from himself, declaring, "My wife Mary is the one who encouraged (me) to help those in need."

Together the couple has instilled in their five children—all trustees of the Foundation---and their 22 grandchildren a deep faith in God and a belief in the adage "to whom much is given, much is expected."

"Tom has been an avid advocate for people who are homeless," Hicks said. "He likes to help in ways that are viable and will last. He has supported agencies like ours with operating funds because he realizes we know best how to use his money.

"Tom is fighting to bring an end to the cycle of homelessness."

Tom was also a strong supporter of Leo High School, his alma mater. The Owens name and reputation were the inspiration for Leo's biggest fundraiser of the year when Tom received the Leo Lions Legacy Award for his lifetime of service to others on Nov. 27, 2018. He followed previous honorees **Andrew McKenna '47** and **Bill Conlon '63**, whose stature in their respective industries drew support and financial commitment from a Who's Who of Chicagoans embracing Leo's mission.

Tom Owens has a saying that defines his approach to life: "DON'T JUST HAVE A GREAT DAY, MAKE IT A GREAT DAY!" In the case of Margaret's Village and other recipients of its support, The Owens Foundation's philanthropic efforts "make the day" for people lost in the shadows of hunger, poverty and homelessness.

Tom and Mary Owens founded The Owens Foundation in 1985. They were inspired by the works of Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who directed them to "go back to Chicago and serve the poor." In 1991, Tom steered the Foundation's resources toward the plight of the homeless in Chicago. Cara Chicago has since placed more than 6,000 individuals in quality jobs with some of Chicago's top companies.

"Tom Owens' work with the Cara Program has been an inspiration in my life," said Cara board member Joe O'Neil, Tom's cousin and a Chicago Bulls and United Center executive. "I'm proud of the work Tom has taken on in transitioning people's lives from the streets into jobs, homes and back to families."

In addition to his numerous Leo High School honors, Tom holds a Doctorate of Humane Letters from Dominican University. He is a life member of the Catholic Theological Union Board of Trustees and co-chairman at The Emergency Fund. He has been honored with the Martin Luther King Jr. Award and the Distinguished Public Service Award from the Union League Club of Chicago. He received the Venerable Mary Potter Humanitarian Award at Little Company of Mary Hospital's Crystal Heart Ball, as well as a Distinguished Philanthropist award.

Tom died on Sept. 29, 2019, after a long illness. He was surrounded by family when he died, which was appropriate. His family—wife Mary, five children and 22 grandchildren—had always been the centerpiece of his truly distinguished life.

"Our heart hangs heavy today—we have lost not just a hero, but a father and friend in the most palpable sense of both words," said Dr. Maria Kim, President and CEO of the Cara Program. "Tom lived his life in epic and profound service to others and was always buoyed by the belief that our greatest days are before us as long as we can lean on the power of a friend.

"Tom gave us the greatest gift of all: the power to believe, in ourselves, in each other, in our city, in our future. Tom did this as only he could ...with the brilliance and tenacity that is and always will be Tom Owens."