

Week of July 13/18

## ESTONIAN CENTRE PROJECT UPDATE

### **Estonian roots are deep and strong for Prozes family**



Andy Prozes is very clear on why he decided to come on board as lead donor for the new Estonian Centre.

“I’m incredibly proud to be an Estonian,” he said. “And I’m very fortunate to be able to provide financial support to the new international Estonian Centre.”

Andy’s business success and acumen are known, but he focuses on his Estonian roots and his family first.

“I want to pay tribute to my mother, Salme, and her journey from Saaremaa to Canada – I’m really doing this for her,” he said. “And my sisters Mary-Ann and Christina. (Christina maintains close ties with the Estonian community in Toronto), and of course my sons Kevin and Darin, grandchildren Tyler, Sonya and Grayson, and daughters-in-law Gil and Rya, all of whom carry the Prozes name. The Estonian Centre will in some way be their legacy since the Prozes name will be attached to the centre.”

Christina, Rya, Kevin and Grayson all make their homes in Toronto.

Andy makes his home in Miami Beach and in the New York area with his wife Laura Heery Prozes, who is an architect like her father and grandfather before her.

“I want to acknowledge Laura’s contribution to the development of the business plans for the Estonian Centre,” Andy said. “She is very community and civic-minded and is extremely interested in how this project will unfold. She was the originator of the business accelerator”. (More on the business accelerator in a future article.)

Andy and Laura are deeply involved in other philanthropic pursuits in their U.S. home base. Laura is on the board of Grove Park, a major effort in Atlanta to rehabilitate and restore a large inner-city community. Both Andy and Laura work with Freedom House,

a non-government organization started by Eleanor Roosevelt in 1941 to promote freedom and democracy. Today it also conducts research and advocacy to measure freedom of the press, freedom of the internet, political freedom and human rights. Estonia ranks in the top two freest countries in the world, and Canada is usually in the top six.

Andy has always been very much in tune with where his roots lie.

It has been a long and circuitous route since he was born to his parents Salme and Konstantine (Carl) Prozes in 1946 in a displaced persons' camp in Geislingen, Germany. A two year-old Andy immigrated to Canada with his parents after they left the camp and the family settled in the Niagara Peninsula, where Carl worked for Ontario Hydro. In true Estonian form, Carl sang in the Ontario Hydro Men's Choir.

Andy attended the University of Waterloo, where he was in the first graduating class in computer science, graduating with a Bachelor of Applied Mathematics in Computer Science, and subsequently received an MBA from York University. He went on to build a distinguished and successful career as a business executive. He invests in and serves on the boards of public and private companies in the US, Canada, Estonia, UK and Brazil, primarily in the information and technology sectors, serving the personal identity, legal, risk mitigation and financial industries, as well as non-profits.

Andy served as CEO of LexisNexis and on the Board of Directors of Reed Elsevier from 2000 until December 2010. Today he serves on the boards of Transunion, Corporate Risk Holdings, Neoway, payfone, nanopay/mintchip, Synaptive, and Ethoca. He is very active in the private equity investment community and works with many of the principal PE firms.

As CEO, Andy led the transformation of LexisNexis from a collection of individual country operations with two products – legal research and lawyer directories – and transformed it into a globally managed and highly profitable provider of online, technologically-based content enabled solutions. During Andy's tenure, LexisNexis grew from \$1.7 billion in 2000 to over \$4 billion in revenue. LexisNexis employed approximately 18,000 people in two distinct business units – LexisNexis Legal, and LexisNexis Risk Solutions. LexisNexis is one of the largest, most technologically advanced providers of professional information in the world, serving over one million users daily.

LexisNexis Risk Solutions provides data and analytics to help risk professionals assess and decide on underwriting loans and mortgages, insurance coverage for homes and autos, and supports functions which depend on analysis of personal data by law enforcement, employee screening, collections, etc.

Prior to joining Reed Elsevier, Andy served as Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer of West Group, part of the Thomson Reuters Corporation, from 1997 to 2000.

He helped found MFS Limited early in his career, which rapidly grew from a start-up to the largest processor of RRSPs and mutual funds in Canada, serving virtually all Canadian financial institutions. Andy ran MFS Limited for over 16 years. It was sold to IBM Canada in 1988.

In 1988 Andy joined Southam Inc, Canada's largest newspaper company with over 50% of Canadian daily newspaper circulation at the time. As President, City Newspapers and New Media, Andy had 13 daily newspapers reporting to him, including The Hamilton Spectator, St. Catharines Standard, Kitchener-Waterloo Record and the Kingston Whig-Standard. He was also responsible for all Southam's electronic content distribution.

Andy is a past Chairman of The US Information Industry Association and has served on the boards of the Information Technology Association of Canada, the Canadian Newspaper Association, and the National Executive Service Corps. Andy was an Executive Board Member of the American Bar Association Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (CEELI), a Board & Executive Committee Member of The Atlantic Council of the United States, a Member of the British-North American Committee, and a Director of The Bruce Museum of Arts and Technology in Greenwich, Connecticut.

He has a range of contacts in Estonia and is travelling there this July where he will meet with Estonian Prime Minister Jüri Ratas and his economic advisors on a number of business opportunities.

He recently met with Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid, and Laura and Andy have gotten to know former President Toomas Hendrik Ilves very well through Friends of Estonia and EnterpriseEstonia.

“The Prime Minister as well as the current and former Presidents are very technologically inclined and supportive of expanding E-stonia, e-government and e-residency and the many ‘e’ efforts underway in Estonia.”

This fits well with the general business approach in the country.

“Estonians are very entrepreneurial and tech-savvy – and Estonia is a world leader in developing start-up tech businesses,” he said. “It is in our genes.”

As lead donor, the Prozes family contribution is \$3.3 million, which also will fund a documentary film on the success of the Estonian diaspora in North America. But there is much more to this involvement than issuing a cheque. As part of his commitment and interest in the Estonian Centre, Andy has joined the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee welcomes Andy's expertise and experience and looks forward to working together as the project moves forward.

Andy and Laura are involved in developing a business accelerator plan for the centre, which will provide space for Estonian and Canadian entrepreneurs with Estonian heritage to start new businesses and establish a “beach head” in North America.

Andy and Laura will be leasing approximately 1,000 square feet in the centre to provide meeting space for fostering business connections. It will be used specifically as a high-tech incubator space to promote ties between start-up technology businesses in North America and Estonia and expand the international appeal of the centre.

The purpose of the accelerator is to attract young people to the centre and expand its international business appeal.

“It’s important for the centre to be attractive to young people and providing this type of space will help create these opportunities.”

Andy emphasizes the new centre is about much more than promoting businesses. It will be home to the Estonian community both here and abroad. He believes the beautiful design, the inclusion of a café and bar area, and the convenient downtown location in an established cultural hub next to Tartu College will all help create a thriving atmosphere for every member of the Estonian community – young and old.

“I would like to see the Centre become a long-term, sustainable operation where people of all ages can gather with one common connector – our Estonian heritage,” he added.

“The Estonian community here is strong, active and engaged in cherishing and promoting our 1,000 year-old culture. We could not be in a position to develop this Centre – and we would not be here today - without the vision and hard work of our parents’ generations.”

“I am very honored to be part of this project, and thank the steering committee and all the directors of the four Estonian organizations for their incredibly hard work and foresight, and for allowing the Prozes family to be a part of this very exciting next step in the Estonian journey.”

*For more information on the Estonian Centre Project, please go to [www.estoniancentre.ca](http://www.estoniancentre.ca)*



*Members of the Prozes family: from right, Andy Prozes, Lead Donor for Estonian Centre Project; Andy’s mother Salme Prozes and son Kevin Prozes.*