

Medal of Merit Presentation – Ella Jean Richter

Friday May 10th, 2017

[AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY]

Good evening everyone. I'm extraordinarily pleased to be here with you as we recognize an outstanding citizen—Ella Jean Richter— with the City of Sault Ste. Marie's Medal of Merit.

Before I continue, I'd just like to take the opportunity to recognize the dignitaries who have joined us today:

I'd like to begin by acknowledging our Member of Parliament, Terry Sheehan and his wife Lisa Bradford who are here tonight.

I'd also like to recognize the members of Council and in some cases their spouses who are in attendance. We have:

- Steve and Sharran Butland
- Paul and Julie Christian
- Frank and Pina Fata
- Joe and Sherry Krmpotich
- Susan Myers
- Rick and Pauline Niro, and,
- Lou and Sandra Turco.

Sault Ste. Marie is extremely proud of how we continue to produce citizens, who individually or as a member of a group, excel in various capacities, bringing great pride to our community in a way that should be celebrated.

In 1969, the Sault Ste. Marie City Council established the Medal of Merit award to annually honour such excellence and achievement. A citation was approved by the Council of the day which reads:

“The Mayor and members of City Council have long recognized the need to pay tribute to those special individuals or groups who achieve top honours in athletic, cultural or academic fields or who make outstanding contributions to our community.”

This Council also passed a by-law to establish a committee that would review nominations from the community and to consider other such individuals who might be worthy of recognition.

Presentation of the Medal of Merit award which includes the medal, pin, and citation, represents Sault Ste. Marie's highest honour.

The Medal has the City coat of arms embossed on its face. The colours of the ribbon and the pin – gold, blue and grey – are intended to project the image of Sault Ste. Marie as a flourishing and prosperous city.

The blue represents the water or seaway, and the grey band represents industry, steel in particular. The significance attached to this medal is indicative of an exceptional achievement or contribution.

Each year, medal of Merit recipients are chosen by the Medal of Merit Committee, comprised of the Mayor acting as chair, and individuals representing a cross-section of the community.

I'd like to acknowledge and thank the members of the 2016 committee:

- Dionne Elgie;
- Jack Ostroski; and
- His honour Justice Romuald Kwolek;

Justice Kwolek is here, the others unfortunately had to send their regrets, but I do thank them for their service on the committee.

Medal of Merit Award recipients are selected from all spectrums and walks of life. The list of past honorees includes scientists, athletes, academics and community builders – people who have contributed to the betterment of our community.

Since the inception of the Award, we have recognized over 150 citizens including: Dr. Roberta Bondar, Dr. David Walde, the Hollingsworth Family, Team Jacobs, Mac and BJ Marcoux, Diane Marshall, Sandra Houston, and Ron Irwin – just to mention a few. Today, Ella Jean Richter’s name will be added to this esteemed group of people.

I’m glad that quite a few members of Ella Jean’s family were able to join us for today’s celebration. They include:

- Daughters Lisa and Michelle;
- Granddaughter Lisa,
- Cousins Brad and Marlene Moore, Fred and Donna Mackenzie and Lorraine Silk.

I know that we also have quite a few of Ella Jean's longtime friends and colleagues in attendance tonight, so please accept my thanks to you as a group for coming here and showing your support.

If there's a common thread when you hear people describe Ella Jean, it tends to be that she is someone who works tirelessly behind the scenes, and who gets things done with determination but also quiet humility.

Ella Jean spent thirty years working with Bell Canada, the last several working as the Regional Director, Community and Aboriginal Relations. In this capacity, she served communities ranging from the Ontario-Manitoba border all the way down to Peterborough.

While with Bell in the 1990s, she helped pioneer a unique partnership between Bell, Sault College, and the Economic Development Corporation that was instrumental in establishing several major contact centres in Sault Ste. Marie. The call centre industry of course remains an important part of our local economy today, employing close to 1,500 persons at last count.

While with Bell, Ella Jean also chaired and sponsored many community events, such as the Bell Celebrity Skate and Youth Action summer employment initiatives.

After concluding her career with Bell, Ella Jean moved on to a new challenge, becoming the Executive Director of the Group Health Centre Trust Fund. In this role, her major responsibilities included fundraising, board governance, and volunteer development for the organization.

Outside of work, Ella Jean has been involved with a variety of organizations and causes. She has been active on boards and committees that include the likes of Rotary North, the Ted Nolan Foundation, the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce, and the former Hospitality and Tourism Sault Ste. Marie organization.

She is a past chair of the Board of Governors for Sault College and in that capacity she helped to lay the foundation for many of the successes that the college has experienced in recent years.

Ella Jean is also the current chair of the PUC Distribution Inc. Board of Directors. In that role, I've had the pleasure of working with her and getting to know her over the past couple of years.

And of course, she has also been a longtime board member with the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation. With NOHFC, Ella Jean has been a strong advocate for Sault Ste. Marie, and has helped to gain support for many important economic development projects in the community and the surrounding area.

Ella Jean has been recognized many times over for her exceptional contributions. She has been a recipient of the Bell Canada HERO award for outstanding service, Rotarian of the Year, and she has received the Chamber of Commerce ATHENA award as an exceptional female role model.

Over the course of her career and her service as a volunteer and as a member of boards and committees, there is no question that Ella Jean Richter has made an outstanding contribution to the community over many years.

On behalf of the City of Sault Ste. Marie, it brings me great pride to present the 2016 Medal of Merit to Ella Jean Richter—a most deserving recipient. Congratulations Ella Jean!