



recognizing  
women  
who  
*inspire*

## Y WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

### **News Release: 2009 YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards Recipients Announced**

**Ottawa, ON** June 1, 2009 – Tonight, the accomplishments of 42 women were recognized at the YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Awards held at the National Arts Centre.

“These women, and their incredible community support, embody the mission of the National Capital Region YMCA-YWCA to build strong kids, strong families and strong communities,” said 2009 Co-Chair Gail Di Cintio. “The Y Women of Distinction Awards recognize not only the amazing contributions of our nominees, but the incredible effect these women have on the people they serve, and the programs and activities to which they are devoted,” said Co-Chair Dianne Wing.

This is the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the awards in the National Capital Region. Since 1994, the Y Women of Distinction Awards have recognized over 600 women who inspire us through their work in our community. These awards celebrate the visionaries of the past, the courageous women who change the way we live today, and the young women who shape our tomorrow.

Ten awards were presented in front of a packed audience at the Theatre in the NAC. Full bios for each recipient follow the News Release. The 2009 recipients are:

**Scotiabank Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient:** Dr. Huguette Labelle

**St. Joseph Communications Arts, Culture and Heritage Award Recipient:** Barbara Gamble

**Business, Entrepreneurial, Trades and Technology Award Recipient:** Moneca Kaiser

**Ottawa Citizen Community Volunteer Award Recipient:** Melanie Bejzyk

**Education and Training Award Recipient:** Carol Hunter

**Global Humanitarian Outreach Award Recipient:** Susan Hreljac

**Rx&D Health Science Research Award Recipient:** Dr. Barbara Vanderhyden

**Healthy and Active Living Award Recipient:** Joanne Curran

**Not for Profit and Public Service Award Recipient:** Donna Hicks

**Young Woman of Distinction Award Recipient:** Shannon Tessier

--- 30 ---

For more information, visit [www.ymcaywca.ca](http://www.ymcaywca.ca), or contact us at 613.788.5043 or [women.distinction@nationalcapitalregionymca-ywca.ca](mailto:women.distinction@nationalcapitalregionymca-ywca.ca).



recognizing  
women  
who

*inspire*

Y WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

## Recipient Bios

### **Scotiabank Lifetime Achievement Award Recipient: Dr. Huguette Labelle**

“Love your work, look to the future without letting your ambitions distract you from your duties, and become involved in your community.” Such is the simple recipe for success of the 2009 YMCA-YWCA Women of Distinction Scotiabank Lifetime Achievement Award recipient, Dr. Huguette Labelle. During an illustrious career as a public servant, Dr. Labelle championed various causes from health care to transport, Aboriginal affairs to nursing education. Not only has she been a mentor in her own right but she has inspired other leaders and mentors through her groundbreaking roles on behalf of women – for example she was the first woman to head the Red Cross in Canada and the first francophone woman to rise to the position of Deputy Minister in the federal government. She is a passionate defender of good governance practices and equality of women, and has shown this through her many positions, volunteer and paid, since leaving government service. Recipient of the Companion of the Order of Canada and Chancellor of the University of Ottawa, she has received honours far and wide for both her volunteer service and dedication to the francophone community. Dr. Labelle’s work has embodied values in the areas of human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption.

### **St. Joseph Communications Arts, Culture and Heritage Award Recipient: Barbara Gamble**

Barbara Gamble combines a successful visual arts career with a history of dedicated community service and leadership. Her art is influenced by natural history and environmental concerns, and is a call to mend the troubled relationship between culture and nature. Numerous public and private collections hold her work and she is recognized for the outstanding quality, creativity and personal expression of her artwork. In 2008, the Canadian Museum of Nature hosted a solo retrospective of her work. Barbara has enhanced life in Ottawa through service on neighbourhood community associations, cultural committees and boards, including The Ottawa Art Gallery, the Enriched Bread Studio and the Firestone Collection. She served on the Board of Directors of Project 4000, a community initiative to resettle in Ottawa 400 Southeast Asian refugees. Barbara helped produce the book, Gift of Freedom, detailing the history of the settlement in Ottawa of the Boat People. Her actions and community contributions reflect an attitude of openness, inclusiveness and a steadfast belief in the power of cooperative action. A respected art juror and speaker this pre-eminent nature artist is committed to ensuring the preservation and well being of our natural landscape and cultural heritage.



recognizing  
women  
who

*inspire*

## Y WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

### **Business, Entrepreneurial, Trades and Technology Award Recipient: Moneca Kaiser**

When Moneca Kaiser started in the field of carpentry 20 years ago, she was unusual. One of few women in the trade then, she has since created an award winning construction company called Moneca Kaiser Design Build. Known for its innovative designs and commitment to environmental ethics, Moneca has been a trailblazer in more ways than one. An advocate for women in the trades, Moneca has given seminars and keynote addresses to students and young people about careers in design, construction and community building. She has worked with Skills Canada, Algonquin College, Ottawa University and others, volunteering her time to encourage young girls to stay in the maths and sciences and young women to choose a trade as a vocation. Moneca continues to evolve as a passionate educator about environmental issues and sustainable community development, teaching workshops on these subjects, founding and chairing several committees to support green initiatives for development. Most recently she added film making to her impressive repertoire in hopes of fostering social change by telling compelling stories with socially relevant themes. Moneca is a true renaissance woman.

### **Ottawa Citizen Community Volunteer Award Recipient: Melanie Bejzyk**

Check out “agenda” in the dictionary. The definition is “what ought to be done”. Now, check out Melanie Bejzyk’s volunteer initiatives and achievements... and be inspired. With an agenda to abolish discrimination against women who have traditionally been marginalized in society, she is clearly all about what WILL be done. Since 2004, Melanie has volunteered for the Host Immigrant and Refugee Program, providing newcomers to Canada with social and cultural orientation, support in practicing English, and friendship. Over several years, Melanie has also volunteered for Pink Triangle Services, a non-profit charity providing peer support, education and advocacy services for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons in the National Capital Region. A facilitator of a peer-support group, a board member, a fundraiser and an events organizer, Melanie is always mindful that learning, sharing and respect are the foundations of equality. As a tireless community volunteer, she continues to enrich the lives of many through her support, particularly of vulnerable women, and has inspired many with her kindness, generosity of spirit and leadership.

### **Education and Training Award Recipient: Carol Hunter**

Carol Hunter’s extensive efforts as a model educator were recently recognized when she was named one of Canada’s Outstanding Principals in 2009 by the Learning Partnership. Drawing on her passion and determination, Carol transformed Vincent Massey Public School into a school that embodies the concepts of diversity, equality and support. Carol took the school’s motto, “Refuse to Lose,” to heart, always ensuring that each and every student received the support and encouragement necessary to succeed. Whether her students were new Canadians still learning English, students in the immersion program, or those dealing with learning disabilities, hearing impairments, or living in public housing, Carol ensured each one felt valued, challenged and supported. Under Carol’s guidance, Vincent Massey Public School received the Order of



recognizing  
women  
who

*inspire*

Y WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

Excellence in Education in 2007. This award, presented by The National Quality Institute, is awarded to a school that has achieved excellent results on all key drivers of school excellence: planning, student focus, people focus, and partnering with the community. Carol empowers children to believe anything is possible, and as such, is creating a better tomorrow through the children of today.

**Global Humanitarian Outreach Award Recipient: Susan Hreljac**

It takes an exceptional woman to raise four children, work full-time, and launch an international foundation that helps more than a half a million Africans have access to safe drinking water. For Susan Hreljac, it started with listening. When her six year-old son Ryan said he wanted to help people in Africa have clean water and make the world “a little more fair,” she did much more than smile and pat him on the head, she helped him take action. She is now the mother of the youngest-ever Order of Ontario recipient and the founder of Ryan’s Well Foundation an organization that, through clean water and hygiene, provides better health in Africa through 484 water points in 16 countries. For girls and women in Africa, who often walk miles every day to get water, access to clean water means more than better health and dignity, it means time and opportunity for education and income-earning. By helping her son achieve his dream to make the world “a little more fair”, Susan has shown that even our youngest citizens can make a difference.

**Rx&D Health Science Research Award Recipient: Dr. Barbara Vanderhyden**

With creativity and great communication skills, Dr. Barbara Vanderhyden breaks down barriers between laboratories and communities. She is a trailblazer in the area of ovarian cancer, a disease that affects 2500 women in Canada each year and for which there is no early detection test. Since 2000, Barbara has held the Corinne Boyer Chair in Ovarian Cancer Research at the University of Ottawa, the only Chair for ovarian cancer research in Canada. In addition to award-winning research, Barbara is a sought-after lecturer, fundraiser, and spokesperson, raising awareness of the signs and symptoms of ovarian cancer. In 1993, Barbara established “Let’s Talk Science-Parlons Science” which sends university graduate student volunteers into elementary and secondary schools where they provide fun and interactive science workshops to kids. This program is so successful it has expanded to remote and aboriginal communities in northern Ontario. By engaging scientists and non-scientists alike, and with her passion for developing next generation scientists, Barbara is contributing to the building of Canada’s brain trust for tomorrow.

**Healthy and Active Living Award Recipient: Joanne Curran**

When Joanne Curran’s 12-year-old daughter was diagnosed with anorexia nervosa, there was little in the way of community support for her daughter and her family. Instead of retreating to fight her daughter’s disease in isolation, Joanne, along with two other mothers of daughters with eating disorders, co-founded Hopewell Eating Disorder Support Centre. From then on, Joanne became an advocate for eating disorder care in Ottawa, spearheading the campaign that opened a treatment



recognizing  
women  
who

*inspire*

## Y WOMEN OF DISTINCTION AWARDS

program at CHEO, co-chairing the Consumer Advocates Network (CAN), which is designed to make mental health care a government priority, and accepting a volunteer appointment as the Director of Children's Mental Health Ontario (CHMO). Through her persistence, tenacity, and countless hours volunteering, Joanne was able to turn a family crisis into an opportunity to enrich the community with hope and information. "When you have Joanne in your corner you have no choice but to succeed!" says Dr. Simon Davidson of the Centre for Excellence for Child and Youth Mental Health at CHEO. There is no doubt that Joanne's effect on the lives of youth, and young women in particular, will continue to be felt for years to come.

### **Not for Profit and Public Service Award Recipient: Donna Hicks**

To make the world a better place: that is the ambition of Donna Hicks. As Chief Executive Officer of Habitat for Humanity NCR, Donna has overseen the construction of ten houses for low-income families, has reduced the debt of the organization by nearly a million dollars and has doubled the volunteer base. She has also encouraged women to enter non-traditional professions — notably through two Women Builds at Habitat, where women have learned the trades — and has conceived innovative fund-raising events, such as the Women Build Gala. She has served the organization as its leader and as a volunteer; she has also contributed over a thousand hours of her own time. She formerly headed the Canadian National Institute for the Blind in Winnipeg. There, she made her mark by developing new approaches to serving blind and visually impaired Aboriginal people. As president of the Women's Health Clinic, she worked to support marginalized women and to mentor young, single mothers. In Vancouver, she chaired the mayor's committee on disability. She has, indeed, made the world a better place in Ottawa, and in other Canadian communities.

### **Young Woman of Distinction Award Recipient: Shannon Tessier**

While in high school, Shannon Tessier knew she wanted to make a difference in the field of medicine so she became a co-op student in the oncology ward at CHEO. Watching kids just like her struggle with cancer, Shannon became inspired to learn what she could to make a difference. She is currently pursuing a Master's degree in molecular biology at Carleton University. While at university, Shannon realized how fortunate she was to have the opportunities she's had so far in life, and this insight inspired her to give back to her community. In September 2006, she participated in the "Let's Talk Science Mentoring Program," which sparked in her a desire to work with youth. In 2008, she joined the CTV Youth Advisory Board and, soon after, Keeping it Going, a program that unites philanthropists and maintains a knowledge base to assist charitable organizations. As part of the Volunteer Abroad program, she applied her research and clinical skills to help patients at a hospital in South America. Within months of returning to Canada, Shannon founded CHANCE, a charity to raise funds for and ship medical equipment where it's needed. In spring 2008, CHANCE made its first delivery — \$250,000 worth of equipment to Ecuador.