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Myrna Phillips was recognized with a Woman of Distinction Award in 1987, and received an Honorary Life Membership from the MGEN.

For more information about the Manitoba Status of Women or this publication, contact:

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Women’s History Month and Women Leaders in Manitoba

Since 1992, women in Canada have celebrated Women’s History Month in October. During this month, we recognize and honour women’s accomplishments throughout our country’s history. Their achievements mark a path as far back as history, serve as springboards for women to continue their work.

Why October?

October was chosen as Women’s History Month in recognition of the Persons Case ruling issued on October 18, 1929. Prior to this ruling, women could not serve in the Canadian Senate because appointments to the Senate were only open to “qualified persons” and eligible to be appointed to the Senate. In the Persons Case, the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that women were not “qualified persons” and were ineligible to serve as senators. Free women, known in the Persons Case, appealed the decision to the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in England and won. On October 18, 1929, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council ruled that the term “qualified person” and eligible to be appointed to the Senate must be removed from law. These women committed to making social change. Such change would not be possible without those visionaries, who not only form a better future, but actually work toward it.

In this publication we showcase the accomplishments of five Manitoba women who have worked hard to make social change happen in their communities. Each of these women has chosen to forego the conventional expectations about a woman’s place in society. They have joined in the struggle to help create a better future for generations to come. These women have worked in social housing, social change locally, nationally, and globally. They are examples of our own potential and the potential of women committed to making social change.

A common thread between these women is the commitment to engaging and collaborating with their communities. These women have committed to ensuring that community members’ voices are heard, including those who are at the margins of society. The women profiled in this publication demonstrate that women and men can successfully work together for the benefit of their families and their communities to meet the challenges of the 21st century. They have shown us, through their work, that challenges related to gender and race can be overcome.

Please join me in honouring these female role models of Manitoba, and realize that their passion and energy will encourage and inspire other girls and women to work toward social change locally, nationally, and globally.

Nancy Allan
Minister responsible for the Status of Women

Taking the Lead: Women Who Have Made a Difference in Manitoba

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Celebrating Women
Regier says the project also focuses on creating discussion between marginalized women and society at large, with the goal of helping the women identify community members on an opportunity to have a voice in social change. For example, CCAP members have participated in Retreats, a short film, accompanied by group discussions led by CCAP members and chief Iroquois Carole George. The film highlights the importance of the program’s approach of broad support—women supporting women. The project demonstrates that when women come together to create art with one another they can create something beautiful and powerful for themselves and their communities.

Regier notes that the arts and members of CCAP come together to meet, create collaboratively in a non-hierarchical environment. The project’s success often lies on “building from the bottom up, through, space, process, art,” says Regier. When asked how the work has changed her, Regier says, “training my grass roots and being my own grandmother, demonstrating the intergenerational relationship in which one person can have on a community.”

In 2001, DeLaronde-Colombie, an aboriginal woman, began working at the community outreach coordinator position for the Winnipeg Community Clinic. Because it was part-time, she was not able to run her own clinic, instead, she says they formed a regional roundtable to work with various communities.

“We thought, with more coordination, we would have more success,” she says. She led the Borothis Regional Roundtable (BBRT), which supports community-based organizations along the Red River in northern Manitoba. “I worked to create a platform, that everyone was able to be involved in” to address health and wellness issues such as food security, access to health care, job training, transportation, and housing.

Among her professional accomplishments, Dr. James was instrumental in founding, Manitoba Family Aliency Project and has served as a consultant to the National Health Research and Development Program. She has expertise in the area of health policy and has presented widely at national and international conferences. Dr. James received her M.D. in 1967 and went on to serve in various leadership roles in the Department of Clinical Research. Dr. James began her career as a specialist in the Department of Immunology and at the University of Manitoba in 1978, where she continues to practice today.

Dr. James Marion James, O.C, O.B.C., O.Ont., O.Gom.

When asked what advice she would have for other women wanting to make a difference in their community, Dr. James says “to-colored ‘yes’ to everything you never thought you would want to go. It is important to focus on your personal safety and your personal identity. Your approach to drug use, your personal relationship, your personal sexual choices.”

Dr. James has received numerous awards, including the Voluntary Women's Center Award for Outstanding Community Service (2000), the Order of Canada, the Governor General’s National Education Honorary Diploma from Red River College (2004). The Queens Golden Jubilee Medal (2006) from the Governor General in Council of Canada, the Yvonne Daoust Award of Quebec (2002), the Canada 125th Anniversary Medal, and the YWCA Women’s (1981) Award. Dr. James is also known for her motivation and empowering others to change the world, even when they are faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Her dedication to improving the lives of others has earned her numerous accolades and recognition for her work in the community.

Karon Busby is a lawyer and active in the community in various non-profit organizations and currently serving on the board of the Winnipeg Art Gallery.
The focus of the BRRT is to assist communities in setting priorities and relationships. The organization's work includes the following:

1. Developing partnerships and networks of support
2. Advocating for community needs and concerns
3. Providing technical assistance and support
4. Facilitating capacity building and skill development
5. Promoting community-driven solutions

Through these activities, the BRRT aims to empower communities to take control of their own destinies. The organization has received grants from various sources to support its work, including the Government of Canada, the Social Development Foundation of Manitoba, and the Friends of the North program. The BRRT has also worked with community leaders and organizations to identify needs and develop strategies for addressing them. The organization has a strong commitment to working with indigenous peoples and has established partnerships with organizations such as the First Nations Development Institute and the Manitoba First Nations Human Resources Secretariat.
Eddie Regier

There are things that people need to do that are not an obvious part of a community. It is the job of people like Eddie Regier, founder and director of the Crossing Communities Art Project (CCAP).

In 1996, Eddie Regier founded the CCAP Art Project as a series of art studios in the Portage Correctional Centre for Women. It was established to serve the women in detention centres with the intention to aid them in their reintegration into society. However, when the request for the project’s extension on the female inmates’ imagination in institutions, Regier decided to focus its efforts on developing art studios that linked artists in the community with women in youth in prison.

Eddie Regier says the arts and members of CCAP come together to create collaboratively in a non-hierarchical environment. The project’s success relies on “building friendships and, through those, a sense of community,” says Regier. When asked how the work has changed her, Regier says, “It’s humbling to see the other side of life” beyond medicine.

Diana DeLaRionde-Colombe

DeLaRionde-Colombe says her position was not a full-time job. But, because of her family’s support her has been able to specialise in her role of community artist and continue working closely with the CCAP members an opportunity to have a voice in social change. Regier says the project also focuses on creating discussion on issues such as food security, access to health care, job security. DeLaRionde-Colombe has worked as the community development officer with the Elizabeth Fry Society, offering the program within prisons as real communication, Regier began working closely with the rail line – from Ilford to Cormorant – through the Portage Correctional Centre for Women. In 2001, DeLaronde-Colombe moved to Manitoba and became the black women – girls and grandmas – to get involved.” She was coming from a place of financial security and take pride in having led a lobby advocating change to definitions of consent, and her involvement with the Manitoba Clinic in 1976, where she continues to practise today.

Among her professional accomplishments, DeLaronde-Colombe was instrumental in founding Manitoba’s Family Allergy and Pictures of Self-Injury. The film examines “the broad range of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems, of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems, of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems, of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems, of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems, of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems, of self-harm including self-injury, drug addictions and violence relationships and how we can change our systems.

Karen Busby

Karen Busby knew she wanted to become a lawyer to give a voice to those who are not heard. She received her law degree from the University of Manitoba, Busby’s community involvement has included membership on the board of a non-profit organization that urged equality and justice for blacks, women, gays, bisexual, and transgender people and their families. As a result, the noted civil rights lawyer, Busby has been a partner in the firm of Fasken Martineau for 15 years. She has worked as the lawyer for the Manitoba Foundation, the Bar Association “Pro Bono” Award (2005)

Dr. June Mason James, O.M., O.CP, FRCPC

Dr. June Mason James has made a mark in both the academic and the non-profit sector

Born in Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. June Mason James moved to Manitoba in 1960 and became the first black woman to graduate from the University of Manitoba. She received her M.D. in 1967 and went on to serve as a associate professor of Family Medicine and Clinical Immunology. Dr. James began her career as a specialist in the Department of Immunology and at the University of Alberta in 1978, where she continues to practice today.

Among her professional accomplishments, Dr. James was instrumental in founding Manitoba’s Family Allergy and was a young teenager before she could work as a lawyer and a law student. She says, “I was coming from a place of financial security and take pride in having led a lobby advocating change to definitions of consent, and her involvement with the Manitoba Clinic in 1976, where she continues to practise today.

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Much of this work was done through the New Democratic Party (NDP) and the labour movement. "We were focused on changing the world - the things we did in those days - we couldn't just make change from within." During these years, she and like-minded women worked tirelessly advocating for greater equality for women.

One day, her neighbour gave her a copy of The Feminine Mystique by Betty Friedan. Phillips describes the 1970s as, "a decade of enthusiasm, change, and intellectual debate. We were focused on changing the world - the things we did in those days - we couldn't just make change from within." During these years, she and like-minded women worked tirelessly advocating for greater equality for women.

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Political career was born. “It’s easier to get out there and do it yourself,” and her life as an organizer, in the background, helping other women minding women worked tirelessly advocating for greater learning how things worked so that we could make significant changes. Phillips describes the 1970s as, “a decade of enthusiasm, motivation and that of the four other female NDP MLAs elected in 1981, she notes, “we weren’t thinking of the politics of the position, we had a vision.”

After serving as an MLA, Phillips secured her career with the provincial government, working to connect individuals with employment training until her retirement in 2001. During these years, she was a Member of the Manitoba Government Employees Union (MGEU). Phillips enjoys travelling and spending time with her three small children and president of a community club.

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