

THE HONORABLE MABEL DEWARE YMCA OF GREATER MONCTON 150TH ANNIVERSARY HONOURARY CHAIR

We are thrilled to have the Honorable Mabel DeWare serve as honorary chair of celebrations marking the YMCA of Greater Moncton's 150th anniversary in 2020!

To say Mabel has had a full and varied life is an understatement.

In 1963, she skipped her Moncton team to a New Brunswick and Canadian Curling Association ladies' curling championship. (The event was the forerunner to the Scotties Tournament of Hearts.) Mabel and teammates Harriet Stratton, Forbis Stevenson and Marjorie Fraser were New Brunswick's first national curling champions. Mabel was inducted into the New Brunswick Sports Hall of Fame in 1976 and the Canadian Curling Hall of Fame as a curler/builder in 1987. She was also recognized on the Moncton Sports Wall of Fame in 1986. As well, she was the first woman inducted into the Governor General's Curling Club in 2008.

Rewind to 1978.

That's the year Mabel was first elected to New Brunswick's Legislative Assembly. She held three cabinet positions during her time in office: Minister of Labour and Manpower (1978–1982; the first woman to hold the role); Minister of Community Colleges (1983–1985), and Minister of Advanced Education (1985–1987).

Then, in 1990, she was appointed to the Senate of Canada, representing Moncton. She retired on her 75th birthday, in 2001.

While Mabel may be best known for her involvement in curling and politics, she has left an indelible mark on the community through her work at the YMCA of Greater Moncton.

For more than seven decades, Mabel has been involved in helping the local Y nurture the potential of individuals, promote healthy living and foster social responsibility.

"I first walked into the YMCA when it was on Main Street in Moncton, at the corner of Main and Alma, when I was about 14 years old," says Mabel. "That was 1940 and the Y was *the* place to go."

In addition to taking part in clubs like Hi-Y, Teen-ettes and Hi-ettes, there were many other activities for youth to enjoy at the YMCA since the building contained a bowling alley, a gym and a pool. Mabel especially liked playing basketball and attending the Y dances.

"Those were the years of the big band sound – Glenn Miller, Tommy Dorsey – so everybody in their teens was dancing then," she said. "We started a dancing program every Saturday night called YMCA (pronounced YIM-CA) night. They charged 25 cents

and they played records of all the wonderful music. We just had a wonderful time there.”

At one of those dances, Mabel met Ralph, the man who would eventually become her husband.

Prior to their marriage in 1945, Mabel learned that the Y was looking for staff to work as instructors for various programs. She offered to help with basketball.

“Nobody else had applied so said asked if I could handle the whole program, gym, swimming, tiny tots, intermediates, basketball,” she said. “I said I’d try. They hired me and I went to work after we were married and I worked all that year. Then they informed me I had to put on a demonstration. So I put on a Y demonstration that involved 149 kids on May 31st, 1946. I spent all my life at the Y that year!”

In 1952, the YMCA on Main Street fell victim to fire. Mabel recalls the discussion about the organization’s relocation, with the eventual choice being a temporary space in a house at the corner of Highfield and Gordon. That structure and an adjacent one were later torn down to make room for a new Y site, which was completed in 1954.

The Y’s Men’s Club was very active in the community at the time and was integral to fundraising for the new Y, says Mabel.

“They put on two shows to raise money and it was called the ‘Y’s Men’s Burlesque Varieties,” she said. “I want to tell you, that was something!”

In addition to her work at the Y, Mabel was also on the local Y’s Ladies’ Auxiliary and its Board of Directors. As well, she was Past President of the YWCA, the Beaver Curling Club and the Canadian Ladies’ Curling Association. She also served on the boards of the Moncton Gyrettes, the Friends of the Moncton Hospital and the Moncton school board. And Mabel was also part of the United Way’s Speakers’ Bureau for 20 years.

Despite her active involvement in the Y and other community activities, Mabel (and her husband) raised a family of four children – daughter, Joanne, and sons Kim, Peter and Michael. All of the couple’s brood took part in various Y programs, including one called Leader Corps and Hi-Y.

“The children learned to be leaders,” she said. “The (Leader Corps) taught all the (Y) programs. They helped with the gym. They helped with the swim. They helped in the locker rooms. They even operated the front desk. It just seemed to be their life.”

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