

TIELINES

The Newsletter of the Canadian YMCA Alumni

In this issue

President's Message	2
YMCA Alumni News	3
What are your YMCA Christmas Holiday Memories?	4
YMCA Fellowship of Honour	5
Our Year End Canadian YMCA Alumni Gathering	7
Values are the Ties that Bind	8
178 Years to Remember	11
Join in the fun at Wild Places, Wild Faces: The Elements	13
Thank You	14

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

November - December 2023

Usually in our end of year edition of TieLines we would expect an inspiring message, wishing everyone all the very best for the upcoming holiday season. I'm finding that to be a very difficult task this year, and I'm sure I'm not the only one that is struggling to think about getting together with family and friends and celebrating in light of all the horrific news reports and images of the wars in Ukraine and now in the Israel-Gaza area. It seems incomprehensible that humans can be so violent to one another. We can only hope and pray that the world leaders will find a way forward that allows for the innocent victims in these areas to begin the long process of rebuilding their lives.

This week, I have been reminded of how strong and resilient the human spirit is in the face of unimaginable hardships. I'm currently visiting my YMCA friends in Bogota, Colombia. Visiting programs and talking to the participants about the challenges they face daily trying to make a better life for themselves and, more importantly, for their children. Many of these participants are Venezuelan refugees who now find themselves starting over with absolutely nothing after making the difficult decision to leave their home country.

Yesterday, we met a single mom, who previously worked as a social worker in Venezuela. Now, she finds herself living in a shanty with her three young children at the edge of an area where they sort and prepare plastics, aluminum and glass for recycling. As we walked along the dirt road filled with discarded clothing and other items thrown away by others, she told us about how proud she was to be doing this recycling work. She is able to provide for her family and she is helping the environment. The YMCA staff support her by providing her tools to better handle the frustrations she feels on a daily basis and she is quick to point out how important that support is to her small successes in being able to look after her family.

So, as I close, my hope for you and your families is that you don't lose hope this holiday season—and as bleak as things seem at this moment that we all do whatever we can, however small or large, to make the world a more peaceful place.

Until next time,

Janet Giles
janet.giles@shaw.ca

Canadian YMCA Alumni News

Celebrating Birthdays!

Happy Birthday to:

November

Jim Commerford, Clarke Hunter,
Don Noble, Franco Savoia, Hal Studholme,
Pat Thompson

December

Bill Bliss, Carole Lang, Shirley Savidant

Welcome to New Members!

This month we welcome Keith Publicover, Ruth Menegozzo and Jim Westaway!

About TieLines

TieLines is the newsletter of the Canadian YMCA Alumni published bimonthly at the end of February, April, June, August, October, and mid-December. Please forward articles for inclusion, any corrections/comments to Diana Deakin-Thomas indicating TieLines in the subject line at dianadeakinthomas@gmail.com. Don't want to receive TieLines anymore? You can unsubscribe by emailing editor.cdnyalumni@gmail.com. To find back issues of TieLines, [click here!](#)

Who are our members?

The Canadian YMCA Alumni is a fellowship of former YMCA or YMCA-YWCA staff, volunteers and/or their partners. We stay connected through TieLines and various ZOOM events. If you know someone who might be interested in joining the Alumni, please share this issue and connect them with Jacqueline Jenkins, our Membership Chair, at ohjackie@rogers.com.

WHAT ARE YOUR YMCA CHRISTMAS HOLIDAY MEMORIES?

Franco Savoia

As Alumni we spent at least 30–40% of our lives at the Y. Christmas was always a special time in the Y's in which I worked. Here are 3 top-of-mind memories:

Playing Santa at the Christmas staff family party at the Toronto Y: Staff, spouses and children gathered at the new North York Y in the early 1980s for the staff family party. As always, there was lots of food, candies and sweets. Each child was given a gift presented by Santa. That year, I volunteered to be Santa. Our son, then 4 years old, came and sat on my lap to receive his gift. He was somewhat nervous as he kept looking at me, as he took his gift. As we were driving home after the party, he asked, "you were Santa, weren't you?" I did my best to indicate that he had truly met Santa and it couldn't have been me, adding that if he didn't believe it, it is likely he wouldn't get any presents on Christmas Day. That seemed to satisfy him but I will never know if he was really convinced.

Opening the new Y on Christmas Day: The new Walker Family YMCA branch opened in May of 1994. As we approached Christmas that year, in discussion with the Board and staff team, we felt that for people living by themselves, Christmas could be the loneliest day of the year. Together we decided that we would open the Y from 10–4 on Christmas Day for anyone in the community. My dear wife Barbara baked some traditional Christmas cakes and cookies. One of our board chairs hosted a reading of the Christmas story in the lobby. Board members and staff volunteered to host and provide supervision. More than 400 attended that first Christmas in the new Y. It became a tradition, and the number grew each year up to 700. It became a tradition for one family...after they opened their presents the whole family came to the Y for a Christmas swim.

Christmas Dinner at the Y: The Downtown Branch at the Edmonton Y had 130+ small rooms, initially to house young people when they came to the city to work. One of the residents became a successful businessman and restaurateur. To show his gratitude for the Y hosting him when he first came to the city, he offered to prepare and host a Christmas for the those living at the Y. This became an annual event. When he passed away he left the Y a small endowment to continue the tradition. In my 12 years as CEO of the Y, I was privileged each year with 20–30 volunteers to host the dinner for the 100 plus people living at the Y: turkey, ham, mashed potatoes, vegetables and all the trimmings served on china dishes...and yes, Santa appeared with presents for everyone. A former resident took the role of Santa for a number of years.

Christmas is a special time of the year in the community and at the Y. What are your memories?

fsavoia@shaw.ca

YMCA Fellowship of Honour

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the YMCA Fellowship of Honour

The YMCA Fellowship of Honour is the highest honour and most valued award in the YMCA in Canada. It recognizes the outstanding YMCA volunteers and staff who have given tremendous leadership while strengthening and expanding the capacity of the YMCA in Canada. Regardless of age or level within the association, all YMCA staff and volunteers are eligible.

Since being established in 1981, over 100 exemplary Canadian leaders have been honoured for their contribution to the YMCA and communities at the local, national and/or international level. Ideally, the induction of YMCA leaders takes place every 3-4 years. Two different levels of awards, Officer and Companion, honour people whose accomplishments vary in degree and scope.

2024 Investiture and Celebration

It is anticipated that the next YMCA Fellowship of Honour investiture will take place in September 2024 in Ottawa, ON. YMCA Canada arranges for each appointee and their guest to attend the Investiture ceremony, hosted by a representative of YMCA's Patron, the Governor General of Canada, as well as the respective Association CEO and Board Chair. Family members of appointees are invited to attend this prominent event.

Why Nominate YMCA Volunteers and Staff?

This is an opportunity to recognize and pay tribute to the most outstanding contributors to our YMCA Associations and their communities. Honouring exceptional individuals instills a sense of commitment that will grow with each new generation. People are our greatest resource, and the YMCA Fellowship of Honour is a way to celebrate their achievements. Each nomination is judged on its own merits, based on the impact that a nominee has made on a YMCA Association and community or communities.

Types of Awards

Two different levels of awards, Officer and Companion, honour people whose accomplishments vary in degree and scope:

	Officer	Companion
Maximum Number to be Inducted	8	4
Years of Service Outstanding YMCA leadership of broad and distinguished scope for the minimum period required	Minimum of 10 years	Minimum of 15 years
Scope/Impact in the YMCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Local, regional, international or specialized contribution	<ul style="list-style-type: none">National or internationalThis person will be recognized nationally within the YMCA
Eligibility for Appointment	Any person who has served the YMCA with distinction in some capacity and who meets the criteria set forth for Companion or Officer	
Not Eligible for Appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">A current chair of an Association board, the National Board, or any member of the Fellowship of Honour Advisory CommitteeCurrent staff members are not eligible for nominationIn the Officer category, nominees may only be nominated 2 years after leaving the YMCA (except in special circumstances such as health)	
Nomination Notes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Awards are not made posthumously (except where the National Board has already approved the nomination)Nominations from prior years are considered only if officially re-nominatedNominations are to remain confidential at all times	

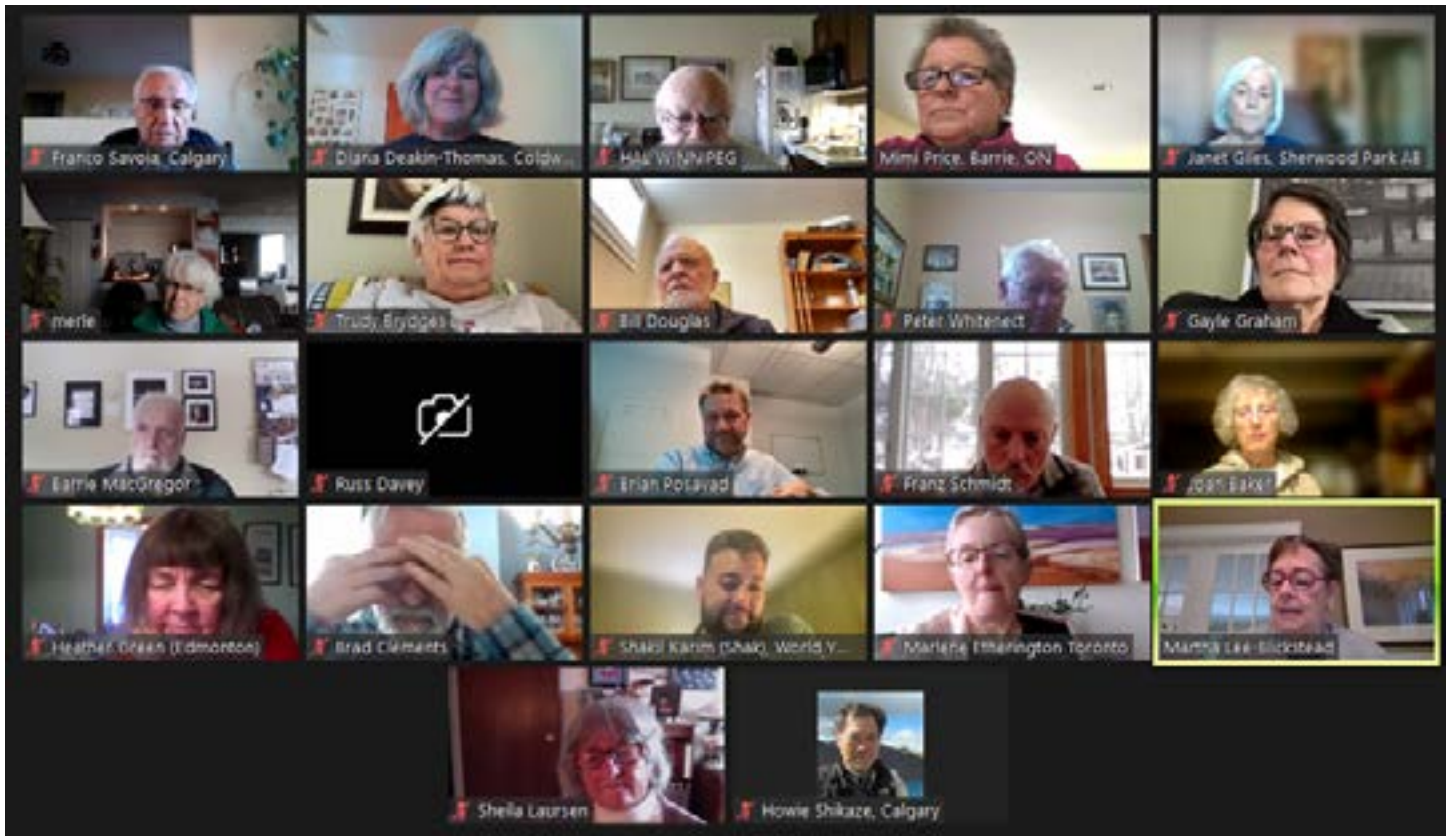
Next Steps

- The Fellowship of Honour nomination process will be launched in mid-November, whereby Association Board Chairs and CEOs will receive the nomination information.
- All nominations including 4 letters of support must be received by YMCA Canada by February 29, 2024.
- The National Board will approve the appointee recommendations in early April.
- In mid-April, YMCA Canada will contact the CEOs of the successful and unsuccessful applicants. The CEOs will contact their nominees.

For more information, please contact Franca D'Angelo at franca.dangelo@ymca.ca

OUR YEAR END CANADIAN YMCA ALUMNI GATHERING

November 29th



Special thanks to our presenters Brian Posavad, CEO of theHalifax Y and Shakil Karim, World Alliance of YMCAs, speaking on the impact of the climate crisis on the YMCA. Brian spoke to his time in Halifax, having endured two hurricanes, a flood and a fire. Shakil spoke of the impact that the World Y is seeing. Following our presentation, Shakil attended the UN conference on Climate Change.

If you missed the presentation, [here is the recording!](#)



VALUES ARE THE TIES THAT BIND

HAL STUDHOLME, OCTOBER 2023

The YMCA is like the Phoenix, the mythical bird that rises from its own ashes and takes flight again. But the YMCA phoenix is unique in two ways, it is VALUE driven and has learned to EVOLVE in response to changes in environments and challenges that threaten its existence. The nearly 180 year history of the Association proves my case.

George Williams began with 12 young men in the bleak days of the Industrial revolution with the goal of bringing them to Christ. His idea gave them hope and purpose and the YMCA was born.

In ten years the enterprise was all over Europe, in Canada and the USA. In 1855, a world conference was held in Paris, France. Despite serious disagreements, a way to unify the assembly around its Christian values was found and the YMCA grew exponentially.

From the 1870s to the early 20th century, the YMCA in Canada and the USA developed a culture of physical education as a core to attract young men. The motto of all round development in Spirit, Mind and Body were the central values of that program core. Then followed a building boom of gymnasias, pools, residences and overnight (resident) camps. From 1900 to 1915, over 300 Y buildings were constructed. The Winnipeg Y opened as the first Y building in western Canada. Memberships flourished. Early ventures into world service saw YMCA's beginning in India, Africa and South America. The Y in England developed similarly to its North American cousins.

World War I saw thousands of young men from Ys in the UK and Canada off to the strife in Europe causing reduced membership and financial hardship. The Y responded by forming War Services which created canteens and aid stations in war zones. Many staff went to man these services while others saw service in the war itself. Some programs in Canada and the USA such as overnight (resident) camps suffered a shortage of young men for staff. The Flu Pandemic further stressed the Association worldwide. In a few cases, the USA Ys gave over gymnasiums as temporary bed space for flu victims. But, service and most programs continued.

The roaring 20s were seen as a period of relaxed values in society. Ys responded with evangelical zeal, with revival-style gatherings of Christian leaders. These gatherings continued into the Great Depression, even as physical programs enjoyed popularity. The Depression itself placed great pressure on the Ys to respond. Food kitchens and clothing drives were common. Some Ys opened rooms in their residences to help homeless men and families.

World War II caused the revival of War Services on an even larger scale than in the previous war. Some Ys offered fitness and recreation for soldiers temporarily stationed in the city. Reduced or even free short term memberships for service men were common. But after the war, the Y experienced a new era with thousands of returning soldiers and, after a brief spell, the Baby Boom. The Y's response was community branches. Many opened as Family Ys, accepting women and Girls as full members. The monastery was being shaken to its core! Memberships soared and programs entered new eras of leadership development, co-ed programs, expanded fitness programming and ventures into pre-school and child care services. The Y was in the forefront of developing such programs and emblazoned on walls of lobbies was the Spirit, Mind, Body triangle. New expansions of its meaning regarding building strong kids, families and communities. Communities that had a Y felt blessed and said so openly.

Yet, cracks were emerging in the china, overbuilding without finances to support ventures, management styles not up to creating strong organizational bases, and a growing understanding that the Y needed a core organizational culture around one major program and modern management concepts. Enter the Corporate Era. The program was Adult Fitness, a firm return to a membership base and the organizational culture, Management Resource Centres. The result was a growing strength in the organization. Some Ys in difficulty were helped and another building boom began on a smaller scale. The future was secure and full of promise.

Then, COVID-19 hit the world. At the same time, it was recognized that private enterprises like Good Life Fitness, Planet Fitness and smaller store-front shops were creating a competitive environment that challenged the Y's hold on the fitness world. The threat was on two fronts, but the major threat was the pandemic. In some cases, it was a Y killer. Over the two years of its sweep on the world stage, as many as 30 percent of Ys in Canada failed. Ys with large debts, without good community roots and unprepared management went under. Some major Y centres had severe reversals. There was a sense of darkening skies in the Canadian YMCA movement.

Clearer minds prevailed. Some of the core problems were a building fixation, the weakness of some Ys with older downtown units, an overdependence on adult fitness as the community expression of the YMCA. Ys with shallow roots in their local communities found that local leaders in government and business knew nothing of the Y or ignored it as just another recreation organization. Those clearer minds, with strong support of Y Canada, consulted, analyzed, did cross-country consultations and began to create plans for rebuilding and emerging stronger. That work is ongoing and proving to be effective as we begin to *rise from the ashes*.

Now, here's where I go off into my own sense of the situation and the future. I go back to my original premise: VALUES.

WHO ARE WE?

The YMCA is, very likely, the longest-serving and most diverse and successful community organization in the world! It has introduced, pioneered and developed more community services and programs than a host of other similar organizations. The list of these ventures is long and diverse: fitness, youth Leadership development, overnight camping and day camps, child care and early childhood activities, community swimming and lifesaving, sports leagues and the sports of basketball and volleyball themselves. I could go on and on. Others may have done them, but we do them best!

WHY ARE WE SUCCESSFUL?

We are a federation, allowing each local community base to determine which programs and services meet local needs. Our membership culture values each member but expands the concept into the community for groups and individuals that may have special needs, be newcomers to Canada, be homeless or in any way disadvantaged or disconnected. In effect, they become associate members. We listen, see, consult and respond to needs with unique, focused help.

ARE WE STILL VALUES DRIVEN?

SPIRIT, MIND, BODY. (Has there ever been a better motto?)

WE BUILD STRONG KIDS, STRONG FAMILIES, STRONG COMMUNITIES.

(These to be tested to see if we really are doing it!)

In essence, these return us to our deepest roots as they are simply restructured ways of saying the ancient but generally accepted, "love your neighbour as yourself."

Undeniably, the long term success of the YMCA has been to put these values into action.

THE PHOENIX

The phoenix rises when we step back and see the whole picture. It has become clear that we can no longer be an organization that says, "build a building and they will come," or, "Fitness 'R' Us!" or, "the community knows who we are, they'll support us if we ask."

Wars, depressions, booms and pandemics have come to challenge us, but we're still here and there is a world of opportunity (and need) ahead of us. There is leadership focused on our next evolution...

... let's help the phoenix rise again.



178 Years to Remember **How Many More Can We Anticipate?**

Gary Gray

While working on my second YMCA John Island Camp book, I have been struck many times by how often important things through time have changed, but yet stayed the same. As the world changes around us, we often mourn the loss of things that were once important to us. At least, as Y alumni, we would recognize that. However, the Y, after close to 180 years, is still relevant and having a major effect on the lives of millions. Some of us old timers look back with a feeling of remorse as things change. Others, especially today's youth, look toward the future with excitement and promise.

While the YMCA has gone through some major philosophical emphases in the past 178 years, one thing has remained constant — our basic mission. We have morphed like a butterfly through a number of stages with the emphasis changing through time from the spiritual to the development of the mind and to the care for our physical being — never dropping one phase but adding to our holistic approach and becoming stronger. As each new stage has developed, we have hung onto the thread that keeps us real...keeps us who we are.

As we look at photos of the past, our memories are flooded with some great things. Where there was need, we stepped up. In times of social upheaval, the Y has been a major responder — and still is. In times of war, the Y has been there with social programs and much needed refreshment as well as an active response to active fighting with its injuries and death. Where there has been a need for schools and recreation in developing countries, the Y has been there. Spirit! Mind! Body!

Some of us with decades of service at the Y look back with fond memories of the way things were. We are proud of the way the Y did things in the past. We feel a loss when we see some Y buildings close and the Y's efforts shift to different areas of need. "That's not what the Y is!" some might say. But amongst us are the youth who are getting turned on to the Y because of its involvement in equality in many areas: climate change, honesty amongst our leaders (and their followers) and concern for each other — and so much more!

I envy the next generation. We have amongst us some brilliant and caring minds. Youth who care about where everything is going, who care about their global brothers and sisters, who care about people. We have youth who may not get excited about some of the tools that we as the older generation have used in our roles, but they are more dedicated to the thread that has kept the YMCA alive for 178 years — Spirit, Mind, Body.

We have exciting years ahead in the YMCA, just like the last 178 years have been exciting, to say the least!

There is a Maori proverb that expresses this thought very well:

He aha te mea nui o te ao?

What is the most important thing in the world?

He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.

It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

The YMCA is people!



Join in the fun at Wild Places, Wild Faces: The Elements

They're back and we couldn't be more excited!

On Tuesday, January 23, 2024, father and son duo and amateur nature photographers Scott and Trevor Haldane will once again hold an online photography presentation and fundraiser – their third one! - in support of Trans Canada Trail. Plan to join in the fun from 7:30 to 9pm Eastern.

You may have joined Scott and Trevor for one of their earlier online photography events and if you did, you know how fantastic it is to see such engaging nature photographs! Be sure to register and mark your calendar for this year's edition.

If you haven't yet attended, make this year your first – you won't regret it!

Wild Places, Wild Faces: The Elements will showcase wildlife, landscapes and stories from across Canada. This is the third edition of their fundraiser photography event and the theme this year is the elements: Earth, Water, Ice and Air.

You will see locations on the Trans Canada Trail throughout the presentation so keep your eyes open!

Plan to join Scott and Trevor on Tuesday, January 23, 2024 by registering for the event now!

REGISTER NOW

bit.ly/47KignO

Admission is by Donation of Any Size

By showcasing their beautiful photos over the last several years in support of Trans Canada Trail, Scott and Trevor have raised thousands of dollars. They have inspired nature lovers across the country to make a donation and we are thankful for their support. These funds are vital, helping to keep the Trans Canada Trail open and accessible for all.

**Make a donation to
Trans Canada Trail**



I want to hear from you! Comments please!

Each month your editor and team works to pull together interesting stories and provide articles that you might enjoy reading. I am so very thankful to those who provide such thoughtful content for me to insert and share. Last month, Hal asked the question if folks would like to continue to hear his musings — and we received positive feedback, of course — the best, though, came from member Patricia Pelton, who enjoys Hal's musings and suggested that we add a comments section to our newsletter to make it more interactive. I would be delighted to receive and share your thoughts on articles you read in our TieLines.

Please send along to me at
dianadeakinthomas@gmail.com.

Thank You!

Staff at YMCA of Northern Alberta lay out and prepare TieLines for production. Thanks to Nick Parkinson (President and CEO), Amber Niemeier (Chief Community Engagement Officer), to Curtis Shurvell for copy editing, and to Abdullah Al-Nono for designing. Franca D'Angelo (General Manager, National Office YMCA Canada) and Alexandra Mooney (Y Canada) distribute TieLines for us. And of course, thanks to Nancy Dube and Marg Flett who check your editor's work! To Scott Haldane for his beautiful photography used in our TieLines. And to those of you who have contributed this month — **THANK YOU!**



Canadian YMCA Alumni
TieLines • December 2023

Photo credit: Diana Deakin-Thomas