

# Honourary Life Members

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## Carol MacCulloch

CANS Honourary Life Member 2011



It's no wonder Carol MacCulloch has been a catalyst for change in the construction industry.

One could say the construction industry is in her genes and that she followed in the footsteps of generations of family members before her.

Growing up in Western Canada, MacCulloch remembers hearing stories about her great-grandfather losing out on a big contract due to a rigged bidding process, seeing pictures of hydro dams that her engineer grandfather supervised, and having churches pointed out on a Sunday drive that her uncle designed.

"After returning from the war, my father and his brother started their own business that my father kept going for 50 years before it was sold," says MacCulloch. "As a teenager, I used to do the company payroll to earn an allowance – I learned a lot of very practical management lessons from my father that helped guide my future decisions at CANS."

After MacCulloch graduated from Saint Mary's University with a Bachelor of Commerce degree, she began working at the Nova Scotia Department of Economic Development.

"Working throughout the province on the Mainstreet Downtown Development program solidified my love for Nova Scotia – the people, the history and natural beauty," remembers MacCulloch.

As part of her work with the Nova Scotia government, MacCulloch spent several years working with the Voluntary Economic Planning construction, manufacturing, mining and transportation sector committees. It was through this work that MacCulloch met a number of board members and volunteers with the Construction Association of Nova Scotia (CANS) and came to appreciate the value of not-for-profits.

"I had the opportunity to partner and collaborate on important issues such as the adoption of the national building code, on changes to the apprenticeship system and eventually to help create a construction industry strategy," she says.

MacCulloch left the public service for a job opportunity with the

Canadian Manufacturers Association, where she continued to be involved with economic development, occupational health and safety and workers' compensation issues in Nova Scotia and worked with CANS members on joint efforts to present private sector views and concerns to government.

In 1991, when CANS was looking for a new president, MacCulloch remembers weighing the pros and cons of leaving the CMA.

"CANS was a wonderful organization with great volunteers, it was independent, had services of real value to its membership, good national affiliations and a strong history of contributing to the economy and quality of life in Nova Scotia," says MacCulloch. "It wasn't a difficult decision to want to join the team."

During MacCulloch's 20 years as president, CANS underwent significant change. "We were constantly evolving and growing with technology, the needs of the work force and current economic times," she says. "It was a dynamic environment and I enjoyed the process of learning and continually expanding the Association and its services."

MacCulloch says that for almost 10 years there were only four staff and zero turnover.

"We worked hard and accomplished a great deal – selling our Halifax Construction Centre Building to allow for a move to Dartmouth was a major turning point. After that, we never really looked back," she says.

During her presidency, the organization also faced its share of issues.

In May 1992, 26 miners were killed in the Westray Mine disaster. The aftermath prompted the CANS' Safety Committee to begin a new approach to health and safety programming within the construction sector.

"From there, we started working together as an entire industry to make workers' safety a priority," MacCulloch says.

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Exactly one year later, the Nova Scotia Construction Safety Association (NSCSA) was formed and registered with MacCulloch serving as its first executive director.

The Construction Contract Guidelines, Steen Decision, Workers' Compensation, government procurement, apprenticeship and the HST change were other significant issues that had an impact on CANS and its members over the years.

"When you look back at the history, the major issues never seem to change," says MacCulloch. "Worker safety, skill shortages and economic challenges continue to influence and affect the construction industry."

According to MacCulloch, some issues take years – if not decades – to resolve, such as having the legislature amend the Builders Lien Act. After more than 25 years of advocating for change, success in 2004 was quite an accomplishment for CANS and MacCulloch.

During the second reading debate of the Bill, MacCulloch was jokingly accused by then Justice Minister Michael Baker of "serendipitous stalking" of then leader of the opposition (Darrell Dexter) in an effort to gain his support for the legislative changes.

In 2002-2003, MacCulloch worked with CANS Board Chair Tim Nobes to create a formal strategic plan by engaging CANS' Development Executives group, past chairmen, board directors and members throughout the province. The input received fundamentally changed the organization and its relationship with both membership and the industry.

"This process was very important to me," says MacCulloch. "It spurred a lot of change and gave momentum to the Association – it better equipped us to deal with ongoing industry issues."

From the strategic plan grew the first version of CANSnet and the introduction of the Association's continuing education programming.

In 2008, CANS partnered with the Department of Education and Nova Scotia Community College (NSCC) to launch the Building Futures for Youth program for high school co-operative education students. The program aimed to promote awareness and increase the number of youth choosing careers in the construction industry.

"This pilot project was a significant milestone for CANS because it fostered a new style of partnership with government and the industry," says MacCulloch. "It allowed us to effectively reach the potential work force and created a common report card to capture project outcomes expressed in terms of shared organization goals."

MacCulloch is pleased that CANS' 150th anniversary scholarship fund is another important legacy for Nova Scotians. To commemorate its years as an association, CANS is providing student scholarships and bursaries at NSCC to meet the growing

needs of the construction industry. According to MacCulloch, the incredible initiative was made possible because David Oulton led a tremendous effort to raise over \$1 million in endowed funds for NSCC.

MacCulloch's commitment to the future labour force went far beyond the scope of CANS. Her passion and dedication has made her instrumental to the evolution and success of the construction industry in Nova Scotia.

As former-chair of the Construction Technology Centre Atlantic Board, co-chair of the Review Committee on the Apprenticeship Act, co-chair of the Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Council, member of the Workers Compensation Board, Technical Safety Act Advisory Committee, Nova Scotia Partners' Forum Construction Sector Council and Business Consultative Group, as well as Office of the Employer Advisor and Efficiency Nova Scotia, MacCulloch has provided advice and been vital to several key pieces of legislation.

MacCulloch has been widely recognized for her wide ranging activities and ongoing commitment to the industry, and in 2009 she received a honorary diploma in Trades & Technology from NSCC.

One of many highlights throughout her professional career, MacCulloch discusses the honour, "the recognition was quite unexpected and I felt very fortunate that I had the opportunity to speak with the graduating class and share my own experiences."

As CANS looks forward to its 150th anniversary next year, MacCulloch is proud of the role she has played in its evolution and confident in its future.

"CANS is only as strong as the people it can hold and attract to its cause. I worked with great people, a dedicated and enthusiastic staff team and tremendous volunteers," says MacCulloch. "While I was off chasing public policy issues, Donna Cruickshank was at CANS keeping the books and the office in line –we were a good team. In the last few years, we began seeing third-generation volunteers become involved with CANS and even second-generation staff members. That says something about the organization. I feel very lucky; I met some incredible people through my involvement with CANS."

MacCulloch says over the last 20 years she had 21 bosses.

"It wasn't always easy, but it was rewarding. Few industries practice entrepreneurship with the enthusiasm that the construction sector has. Contractors are not afraid to make decisions and they aren't afraid to take risks. I learned early on to never underestimate the creative solutions that a contractor can find," she says.

In May 2011, MacCulloch ended her journey with CANS as she retired from her role as president. Although she is no longer seen in the office Monday to Friday, through her ongoing commitment to the construction sector, MacCulloch continues to be a driving force for industry change.

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