

Ottawa's Order of Canada recipients

By Robert Bostelaar, Ottawa Citizen May 7, 2014

Heather Menzies has two important events on her schedule.

On Wednesday, she will be among 45 citizens — seven of them from the Ottawa area — to be invested as members or officers of the Order of Canada by Gov. Gen. David Johnston at Rideau Hall.

And next week, she'll be at a launch party to sign copies of her latest book, *Reclaiming the Commons for the Common Good*, in which she visits the Highlands of her Scottish forebears to examine the co-operative practices that existed before the idea of private property took hold.

This book is her 10th and, vows the 64-year-old author, activist and one-time newspaper reporter, her last.

“It doesn't mean that I won't do any more writing, but no more books,” she adds. “Books are huge.”

But it's less the workload — Menzies was born to be busy — than her sense that *Reclaiming the Commons* is a summation of her earlier works, a seemingly diverse body that she has come to realize has a constant theme: the importance of community and the need to reconnect with one another and the earth. And it seems a particular sequel to *No Time*, her 2005 examination of the technology-driven stress of modern life.

Being named to the Order of Canada could also be a signal. “Now there's a nice completion!” she says, laughing.

More than 6,000 people have been invested since the order was created in 1967 to recognize achievements and service to the nation.

Menzies, an adjunct professor at Carleton University, is being recognized both for her influential writing on technology and culture and for her role as “passionate advocate” for social justice.

Among her causes is a project to help people with mental illnesses gain financial literacy and establish the bank accounts and bill-payment systems that everyone needs to function. A coming report will detail the project’s success in reducing stress for participants and lowering their dependence on the health care system.

She’s a founding member of the Ottawa-based Women’s Health Project, which supports victims of gender-based violence in places like Bosnia and Somalia. The recent abduction by Nigerian schoolgirls, Menzies says, is but one example of the pervasive culture of sexual violence in Africa.

And there are other topics, other interests, all on the community theme and worthy book subjects, perhaps, for an author whose retirement announcement has met with skepticism.

“I think there is a betting pool out there,” she admits.

Other recipients

REUVEN BULKA

Undeniably a giver, Rabbi Reuven Bulka has donated blood 345 times. But the longtime leader of Congregation Machzikei Hadas is being honoured for much more. Bulka, familiar to many from his newspaper columns and radio programs, is the founder of Kindness Week, dedicated to recognizing community contributions and fostering the “pay-it-forward” principle. He’s widely known for his support of humanitarian causes, health care campaigns and interfaith dialogue. And he’s the author of dozens of books on religious themes as well as a moving tribute to his parents. In a 2007 Citizen interview, he summarized the lessons he received from his mother and father: “Give everything your maximum effort,” and, “Don’t look for shortcuts.”

MONICA PATTEN

The order’s motto is “Desiderantes meliorem patriam” (They deserve a better country). As president and chief executive of Community Foundations of Canada, overseeing a network of local grant-making organizations, Monica Patten played a key part in delivering a better country to all Canadians. Patten, reports the office of the secretary to the Governor General, “guided the movement through a period of unprecedented growth, encouraging philanthropy and helping generous citizens channel their giving to best meet community needs.” Now retired, she volunteers for several charitable groups.

SARA VERED

When the Order of Ottawa was established in 2012, community builder Sara Vered was among the first 15 recipients. Now the Order of Canada further recognizes her philanthropy and involvement in organizations ranging from the University of Ottawa Heart Institute to the National Gallery of Canada. Vered and her late husband, Ze'ev Vered, an Ottawa builder, established the Vered Jewish Canadian Studies Program at the University of Ottawa with a \$1 million donation. In 2010 she was honoured at the Jewish National Fund's Negev Dinner for her commitment to charitable causes and the arts.

ROBERT THIRSK

When Robert “Bob” Thirsk shares his love of science with young people, he speaks from a perspective few others can offer. Thirsk, to be invested as an Officer of the Order of Canada, has twice travelled to space as an astronaut and was the first Canadian to complete a six-month mission on the International Space Station. With degrees in both medicine and engineering, he conducted research on microgravity to discover how plants, animals and humans may change in space-flight conditions. Thirsk has helped develop educational projects that allow students to participate in space research, and serves as a vice-president of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

WESLEY NICOL

“Self made” is a frequent description for Wes Nicol. After putting himself through law school, the Ottawa native returned to the capital and in 1966 founded Tartan Homes, which he would build into a major property developer — in Ottawa and Florida — even while continuing his legal practice. His family foundation supports several Ottawa charities, and he has long been a passionate advocate for student entrepreneurship. The Nicol Entrepreneurial Award hands out prize money to university students across Canada. while the Nicol Entrepreneurial Institute at Carleton University serves to nurture new generations of self-made men and women.

GEOFFREY GREEN

The poles have a magnetic pull on “Geoff” Green of Chelsea, Que., spurring him to lead more than 100 expeditions to the Arctic and Antarctic. A committed educator, Green founded Students on Ice, a program that groups young people from around the world with diverse leaders and experts on polar expeditions. Notes the governor general's office: “He has brought together youth from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds as a means of nurturing a heightened understanding and respect for the planet's global ecosystem and the inspiration to protect it.”

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