

NEWS

May Court celebrates!

By Christine Beelen

On May 7, 2023, a toast will be offered to the members of The May Court Club of Ottawa, alongside members of the community, friends, and family, to mark 125 years of service to the city. Founded by Lady Ishbel Aberdeen in 1898 to provide young ladies of leisure a way to give back to their community, the Club has evolved into a dynamic group of women who work to fill needs in our city. As the wife of a former Governor General, Lady Aberdeen was active in founding the Victorian Order of Nurses, the National Council of Women of Canada, and the May Court Club.

Lady Aberdeen saw the Club addressing gaps in the range of services available to women, children, the needy, and the disabled in Ottawa. Through fundraising and volunteer service work, the women of the Club have done just that. From opening the first tuberculosis clinic in Canada, and supplying knitted clothing to soldiers and food to families whose husbands had gone off to fight in World War I and II, to entertaining children in hospitals and schools with puppet shows, reading to school children, and supplying library services at hospitals, the list goes on.



Members of the May Court Club of Ottawa, (left to right): Vice President Kathy Yach, Valerie Zinger, President Donna Shields-Poë, Holly Hesper-Quirk and Jayne O'Brien.

PHOTO BY ELI DUERN

The Club was housed at a variety of addresses in Ottawa prior to buying the Ewart home on Cameron Avenue in Old Ottawa South in 1959. The stately home was renovated to include meeting rooms and then expanded to include a convalescent home for women who needed additional care to recover from illness or surgery. In 1999, the convalescent home transitioned to hospice care, and Hospice Care Ottawa opened the May Court Hospice. The Club

provides the space rent-free, along with major maintenance, some operating funds, and volunteers to the hospice. In recognition, the Club has been named as a Sustaining Benefactor of Hospice Care Ottawa.

Ottawans will remember the fancy dress balls and cabarets, fashion shows, designer showcases, Fantasy Trees and Treasures in the bridge between the Rideau Centre and The Bay, all fundraising efforts by Club members to support the needs of our community. The Club has operated the Bargain Box, a thrift shop on Laurier Avenue East since 1971. Shoppers find bargains while supporting the Club's major fundraising effort. In addition, the Bargain Box donates items to a number of groups including the Sandy Hill Community Health Centre, AIDS Committee of Ottawa, the Dalhousie Food Cupboard, and the Salvation Army. They have also helped refugees from Afghanistan, Syria, and Ukraine with warm clothing. Recently, the Club started opening its doors to the public for craft markets, with items carefully made by members, including sweet treats. During the COVID-19 shutdown, hundreds of masks were made, and all items were sold at tailgate sales or ordered online. The Club is now back to being able to have guests, and this past Christmas Market was very successful.

Over the years, the Club has supported numerous organizations in Ottawa, through gifts or grants, including the Heart Institute, the Rotary Club, Christie Lake Camp, the Community Laundry Co-op, and Cornerstone Housing for Women, to name a few. Nutrition programs have always been important to the Club. Children leaving hospitals during the Depression years were visited to ensure they had healthy food to eat. In the mid-1990s, the Emergency Food Box Program was established to provide healthy snacks to children who arrived at school

hungry. That effort was followed by support to six of the Community Houses in Ottawa to provide funds for their after-school programs. Some members even participated in literacy and tutoring activities. Despite the pandemic bringing a temporary halt to these projects, the Club provided a \$24,000 donation to the Britannia Woods Community House to fund healthy snacks for their After-School Program.

As Canada's oldest women's service organization, the 125th anniversary of The May Court Club of Ottawa is certainly one to be celebrated. Plans are underway for a Celebration Luncheon at the Canadian Museum of Nature (Hatch Salon) on May 7th. "The Celebration Luncheon is an opportunity for both members of the Club and the community to acknowledge the dedication of hundreds of women who have contributed to the Ottawa community over the years" (Donna Shields-Poë, Club President). Tickets will be available for purchase, and the community is invited to join the celebration. To mark this milestone, there will be a special presentation at the luncheon, and \$125,000 will be awarded to an Ottawa organization that works with children and families in the city.

Christine Beelen is a Past President of The May Court Club of Ottawa and proud of the Club's 125 years of community service.



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The May Court Club of Ottawa Celebration Luncheon

May 7th at the Canadian Museum of Nature
Tickets will go on sale March 1st
For more information go to maycourt.org