



# Soroptimist Across Canada



Eastern and Western Canada Regions—Fall/Winter 2025

*Soroptimists in both Eastern and Western Canada Regions recognize that we live, work and play on the traditional ancestral lands of many First Nations across our country. We acknowledge the tumultuous history endured by the First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples, and we commit to moving forward with mutual trust, respect, reciprocity, and collaboration in the spirit of reconciliation.*

## Governor Eastern Canada

Cheryl Ball



On September 25, 2025, Soroptimists from Eastern and Western Canada attended Maryam Monsef's talk on leadership during economic uncertainty.

### Maryam Monsef's Inspiring Talk: Leadership in Tough Times

On September 25, 2025, Soroptimists from across Canada gathered for a memorable session with Maryam Monsef, a dynamic leader whose journey from cabinet minister to grassroots advocate is nothing short of inspiring. Her presentation wasn't just about surviving economic uncertainty; it was about thriving and making a real difference.

Maryam shared personal stories, including moments when her original dreams were derailed. Instead of giving up, she found new goals and reminded everyone that even small gestures, like an award, can spark hope and ambition in someone's life. She quoted a friend's father: "The world is broken. There are too many people who have forgotten how to dream." Her message? Never underestimate the power of encouragement and support. Research backs her up: when women are recognized and uplifted, they're more likely to chase their dreams and succeed.

She brought the room to life with examples of unified advocacy. Peterborough's community kept Sunday transit running, YMCA members secured a massive housing budget for women fleeing violence, and the threat of two million women marching on Ottawa led to the creation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. These victories weren't handed out—they were won through relentless effort. Maryam's rallying cry: women's rights are hard-won, and we must keep fighting for them.



The pandemic changed everything, she explained. Suddenly, affordable childcare became a national priority, and the \$10-a-day childcare program rolled out quickly because women's participation in the workforce was essential for the Canadian economy.

But Maryam didn't shy away from tough truths. She warned that in many countries, women's rights are slipping—access to education, freedom to read, travel, and even the right to choose marriage are under threat. Soroptimists, she said, have the power to drive change. By joining forces, picking a cause, and making their voices heard through media and direct advocacy, they can make a real impact.

Maryam closed with a challenge: "Be brave, and be bold!" The world needs Soroptimists to keep supporting marginalized women and girls, helping them dream big and achieve those dreams. With hope and action, anything is possible.

## Governor Western Canada

## Chari Grant



Get ready for the celebration of the century! We are just around the corner from celebrating the one hundredth birthday of SI Vancouver and one hundred years of Soroptimist in Canada!

The Western Canada Region Board and the Conference Committee have some amazing things planned for this year's Conference. Those of you who will be in town on Thursday April 22<sup>nd</sup> can sign up to jump on the bus for a real-life *Magical Her-Story Tour*.

And you are in for a treat on Friday night, where we will be having a 100<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration for SI Vancouver and Soroptimist in Canada! Saturday evening will feature a gala celebration where we will welcome our new Western Canada Region board, helmed by the wonderful Shirley Stewart. For the sessions, we have a great workshop planned for you as well as an inspirational panel discussion. You'll have to wait for the Call to Conference for all the details, but rest assured, it's going to be a Conference to remember. Since this is the one hundredth anniversary of Soroptimist in Canada, we are extending the invitation to Soroptimists from all across the country to join us at the Sandman Signature Vancouver Airport Hotel and Resort in Richmond BC from April 23 to 26, 2026. That means our sisters from Eastern Canada Region are welcome to join the party! We look forward to celebrating with Soroptimists from coast to coast to coast.



~Governor Chari Grant.



The club came together in just three months, and by August 1 had 53 charter members! We held the Charter ceremony on October 7, with membership now up to 55.

In late April I, as one of the WCR membership chairs, was given contact information for Sue Gordon, a woman in Tsawwassen who wanted to start a Soroptimist club in her community. Our WCR Spring Conference was in Tsawwassen, so my membership co-chair Heather Rollins and I met with Sue the

morning after the conference. We gave her some ideas, and she took it from there.

Sue agreed to an interview to be included in our newsletter, but that hasn't happened yet. Here is a recent email exchange between us, lightly edited.

**Colleen** *I know other clubs will be very interested to learn how you managed to sign up so many women, and in such a short time. I asked a while ago if I could interview you, but I think you have told us what you did. Social media posts in lots of community groups, a private FB group for interested women, plus one-on-one contact and encouragement. Am I missing anything? It's a recipe we're using in trying to revitalize another club, with some success.*

**Sue** *Yes you're definitely on track with the things I did to get this club going. I actually only published my original post in two Facebook groups, but that's only because we only have two community groups. One is called the Tsawwassen Loop and the other one is called Ladner's Landing, so one in Ladner and one in Tsawwassen. Anyone that messaged me with interest, I personally messaged back a summary as to what being a Soroptimist meant and their mission. I stressed if they felt the organization aligned with their values and it was a good fit they could fill out the registration form and submit their membership dues. I did stress that if they wanted to register and be a charter member, they would need to do that before August 1.*

*Once people expressed an interest in actually joining I had a separate private Facebook group for paid members only. That is the group we're using now.*



You can follow the club on Facebook here: <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=61577812752524>

# SI Peterborough Celebrates 80 Years of Service Submitted by Dianne Nielson

On Saturday, October 27th, Soroptimist International of Peterborough celebrated 80 years of service with an afternoon social attended by community partners, visiting Soroptimists, and club members.



The event featured heartfelt and inspiring speakers. **Daryn Brito**, a 2024 Federation *Live Your Dream* Award recipient, shared her powerful story of overcoming personal challenges to become a university student now pursuing a Master's program.

**RoseMary Reid** recounted her journey from President of SI Peterborough to her leadership roles as President of the Federation Board of Soroptimist International of the Americas and member of the Board of Directors of Soroptimist International. She also shared stories of her travel and service experiences along the way.



Current President **Tanya Fusco** offered a brief history of the Peterborough club, highlighting its many contributions to the community over the past eight decades.

Past President **Catalina Malin** served as MC for the afternoon and chaired the organizing committee, made up of past club presidents.



# Soroptimist Club of North & West Vancouver Marks 75 Years of Empowering Women and Girls

Submitted by Tamara Klein



On September 27th, the Soroptimist International Club of North & West Vancouver transformed the West Vancouver Yacht Club into a vibrant hub of celebration, marking 75 years of empowering women and girls. The sold-out Lobster Dinner Fundraiser welcomed over 100 guests, all eager to share in the club's legacy and future.

Club President Sharon Lockhart welcomed guests and spoke about the club's contributions both locally and globally. She emphasized the importance of raising the club's profile in the community, saying, *"Soroptimists are the world's best-kept secret. By raising our visibility here in North and West Vancouver, we can attract new members and raise more funds to empower women and girls through education, mentorship, and support."*

The evening was a joyful tribute to the club's roots, stretching back to its charter in 1950. Guests enjoyed a delicious lobster feast, lively music, and heartfelt stories including a moving speech from Diana Orejuela, a recipient of the Western Canada Region Live Your Dream Award. Diana's journey, made possible by Soroptimist support, inspired everyone in the room.

A spirited silent auction added to the fun, raising vital funds for local programs. Every dollar will help fuel initiatives like the Live Your Dream Awards, ensuring the club's legacy of empowerment continues for generations.



But above all, the night was a celebration of friendship, community, and the unstoppable power of women helping women. Special thanks go to the extraordinary Lobster Dinner Fundraising Team: Lourdes Rodríguez de Hall, Una Kerin, Veronica Loat, Jane Oulton, Hanneke Eyres, and Diana Palmer.

Here's to 75 years of Soroptimist joy—and to many more ahead!

## SI Saitama Celebrates 50 Years And Thirty Years of Friendship with SI Edmonton

Submitted by Jayne Carre



It all began in 1995, when Jayne set out for a conference near Tokyo—an era before emails and instant messaging. To connect with local Soroptimists, she sent a letter to SIAHQ, hoping for a nearby club recommendation. Soon after, a faxed invitation from SI Saitama arrived, complete with train directions and a warm welcome. Imagine the delight of stepping off the train to find three gracious Japanese women waving little Canadian flags, ready to whisk her away to a luncheon. Tomie Kuga, then studying Shakespeare, bridged any language gaps with her fluent English and thoughtful translation.

Over the years, our clubs have reunited at Federation Conventions—especially in Hawaii, where a special tea room once brought Friendship Link Clubs together to share stories, gifts, and laughter. Today, technology has made it easier than ever to stay connected. Email, messaging, and social media help us exchange updates and memories, and many SI Saitama members now feel comfortable communicating in English, reflecting the wonderful spirit of international friendship. Yet, the joy of sending cards and surprise packages remains. Just before the Canadian postal strike, Leticia Masuda sent a delightful parcel: a club photo, a hand-crafted calligraphy thank you card, sweet potato treats, and 50th anniversary graphics—all shared at our SI Edmonton October meeting. SI Saitama's celebration drew 350 attendees, a testament to their vibrant community.

### Celebrating Our Sponsors: November Appreciation Evening

We are excited to announce that our club will be hosting an evening in early November dedicated to expressing thanks and gratitude to our sponsors for their generous support of our programs and initiatives. This special event is an opportunity to share with our sponsors the meaningful impact their contributions have made in our community and to provide an overview of the programs they help make possible.



Building on the success of last year's inaugural event—which was warmly received by the 20 guests who attended—we look forward to another memorable evening of connection and celebration. Sponsors will have the chance to meet one another, learn more about the lives changed through their support, and hear firsthand stories from program participants.

## Girls Leadership Camp Kenya

Submitted by Megan Eastwood

Members of Soroptimist Tri Cities are once again returning to Kenya to volunteer at the Girls Leadership camp that SFC is currently supporting. Over 200 schoolgirls from around Kenya attend the camp each year. At camp various learning objectives are covered, including:

- Making vertical gardens from readily available grain sacks. Enabling a family to feed themselves plus have left overs available to sell.
- Raising chickens. Enabling a family to feed themselves plus have left overs available to sell.
- Menstruation, hygiene & female health; A doctor attends the camp to explain menstruation & what is happening to their bodies, cervical cancer, breast self examination, how to avoid getting pregnant, morning after pill, how to get help if they are being abused.
- The Soroptimist Dream It Be It curriculum and career fair.
- Management & leadership training.
- Sewing underwear from old t-shirts. Enabling the girls to be able to make their own (many have never owned underwear). This class also covers setting boundaries about private parts. The girls are given sewing kits and encouraged to teach their sisters and friends how to make underwear.

Each girl is given a Days for Girls Menstrual Kit and taught how to use it. Visit this link to view the video explaining the kit (<https://youtu.be/JsASpf-2qiU>). These washable/reusable kits are good for 5 years, providing 5 years of being able to attend school, work, activities during menstruation. So simple, so effective.



## SI Tri cities and SI Canada West Online *The Virtual Career Library: Profiling Indigenous Women* Summer Project 2025 Submitted by Katrina Elliot et al

The VCL (Virtual Career Library) began as a regional Dream it Be it Project in 2020. The project stalled because the number of volunteer hours required to edit the mentor videos and make them available online was monumental. During the summer of 2025, led by SI Canada West Online, with support from Katrina Elliot of SI of the Tri Cities, 17 year old Brianna Pope, who lives in Williams Lake and is a proud member of the Stswecem'c Xget'tem First Nation, was hired to add profiles of Indigenous women over the summer months. We were able to take advantage of Canada Summer Jobs for Brianna, through Social Ventures Circuit, a non-profit network helping to grow social enterprises.

*Virtual Career Library Indigenous Women Summer Project Team are Barb McCoy, Suzanne Heron, Brianna Pope and Katrina Elliot*

### **Spotlight: Brianna's Journey with the Virtual Career Library**

Brianna is a passionate lifelong learner who joined the Virtual Career Library project to give back and honor the mentors and role models who shaped her life. Her goal was to create a safe, inspiring resource for young Indigenous women, allowing them to see themselves reflected in diverse career paths and personal stories. Through her work, Brianna highlighted the thriving careers of Indigenous women across Canada, aiming to expand horizons and foster connections for the next generation.

Education and economic opportunity are central to Brianna’s vision for Indigenous women’s success. Drawing on her experience designing independent studies on the Social Determinants of Indigenous Health for the B.C. curriculum and participating in Future Global Leaders courses at UBC, Brianna brought strong communication, project management, research, and video editing skills to the project. Now in grade 12, she plans to apply to universities in BC and Ontario for Health Science, with hopes of pursuing medicine.



## Project Highlights

This summer, Brianna interviewed 32 Indigenous women from a wide range of careers, with over 100 more leads for future interviews. Women from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick shared their stories, teachings, and career inspirations. Each interview showcased holistic thinking, resilience, professionalism, compassion, and a deep connection to Indigenous cultures. Brianna was deeply inspired by these women and hopes their stories will encourage others to pursue their dreams.

SI Canada West Online is now using these interviews to develop a virtual Dream It Be It program for Indigenous schools in 2025–26. The Virtual Career Library will be available online, inspiring Indigenous and non-Indigenous girls to overcome obstacles and pursue their ambitions.

## Lessons Learned & Looking Ahead

Key learnings included the importance of persistence, clear project planning, and creating safe spaces for sharing stories. Referrals played a vital role, and next year’s project will focus even more on geographic diversity. Brianna hopes to see more Indigenous women from coast to coast represented and the VCL accessible to young women in schools. Brianna’s experience reinforced the value of bringing our whole selves to our education and careers, and the courage to share our journeys to inspire others to take their first steps.

For a look at the developing VCL, visit [www.virtualcareerlibrary.ca](http://www.virtualcareerlibrary.ca). Brianna has also provided us with a link to a Google Drive folder that has interview videos not yet uploaded to the website. <https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1c7WNjLTL-fApuc7hyi48zfK9lKeFpJzo>



There are pathways out there you may have never heard of, let alone thought about for yourself.

No career has a gender. If you discover a dream, you can achieve it. These women will show you how...

Source: <https://www.virtualcareerlibrary.ca/>

April 2025. Veera Mavalwala VP of her club SI Delhi is only 3 years old and already participating in many amazing programs. Their Women's Empowerment in Rural Areas project was taken to present at the UN last year. Other initiatives of SI Delhi include teaching women to sew, Menstrual programs, libraries for children with a reading room and lectures, tree planting, warm clothes for night guards and organized stays in a Parsi guest-house. They are in the SIGBI Federation and to charter a club required participation in three projects. We exchanged gifts and also during our visit, SI Edmonton presented one of their LYD Award winners with her award as she could not make the official ceremony held earlier that month. How lovely it is to connect with and share with Soroptimist friends world wide.



## SI Saskatoon Pays School Fees in Kampala

Submitted by Melanie Kenny

A couple of years ago, SI Saskatoon formed a friendship link with SI Kampala in Uganda. Since then, we've really enjoyed exchanging updates on our activities and building a great connection with their club.

Not long ago, the SI Kampala president let us know that several girls in their community were going to have to drop out of school because there just wasn't money to cover their fees. While we didn't have a budget line for this, we knew we had to do something—after all, helping women and girls access education is exactly what we're here for!

So, we got creative and found a way. In July, we were able to send \$3,000 to SI Kampala to pay school fees. It was something our whole club felt strongly about, and we were all thrilled to be able to make it happen.

We've since received some wonderful photos from the students, which we're excited to share. This is such a great example of how meaningful friendship links can be!



# Celebrating Barb Fraser SI Thunder Bay's Inspirational Member

Submitted by Gov. Cheryl Ball

## A Milestone Birthday and a Lifetime of Service

This October, SI Thunder Bay proudly celebrates Barb Fraser, who reached her remarkable 95th birthday on October 3, 2025! As Soroptimists everywhere celebrated the anniversary of our organization's founding, Barb's family and friends gathered to mark her extraordinary 95th birthday, making the occasion doubly special

Barb continues to be an active participant in our monthly meetings, showing keen interest in club projects locally, across Canada, and within SIA and other SI federations. Her positive and friendly spirit inspires us all. At 95, Barb impresses everyone with her vitality—she attends meetings unaided by hearing aids or mobility devices. [

Among Barb's many Soroptimist memories, her proudest was carrying the Canadian flag at the SIA Convention in Calgary, representing Canadian Soroptimists on a national stage.

Barb joined SI Thunder Bay in January 1982 and has been a dedicated member for 43 years. She has served as club president and held numerous board positions, most recently as Club Archivist. Barb fondly recalls attending Eastern Canada Conferences, Spring Conferences, and SI Conventions in Australia and Japan. Notably, she met Scottish Soroptimist Friendship link members in Australia, with whom she had corresponded for years—long before the internet made such connections easier.

Barb married her husband Lorne in June 1953, sharing 70 happy years together and raising three sons: Clint, Ken, and Doug. Summers are spent at the family cottage with Doug, daughter-in-law Linda, grandchildren, and visits from Ken and Clint from British Columbia.

Born and raised in Fort William (now Thunder Bay), Barb graduated as a registered nurse from McKellar School of Nursing in 1953. Her 41-year nursing career included work on the surgical and medical floors at McKellar Hospital and 21 years as administrator of Central Park Lodge nursing home. [

Barb Fraser's legacy is one of service, leadership, and inspiration. SI Thunder Bay is honored to celebrate her achievements and ongoing contributions to our club and community.



## SI Thunder Bay Holds Successful Yard Sale

Submitted by Kathleen Rismondo

### GRAND SLAM!

The Soroptimists Thunder Bay truly knocked it out of the park at last Saturday's Yard Sale. With the bases loaded all day, we saw a record-breaking crowd and raised an incredible \$2,041.07 for our club funds after expenses. Every member of our all-star team played a key role—whether pitching in with donations, fielding tasks behind the scenes, or stepping up to promote the event. Special thanks to our outfielders for drawing in the crowds and to our support staff for keeping everything running smoothly. Thanks to everyone's teamwork, we all hit a grand slam and made this event a home run for our club.



## SI Thunder Bay Continues to Support KIVA

Submitted by Lee-Ann Nalezty



Join us in empowering women around the world! Through Kiva, our club lends small amounts—starting at just \$25—to female entrepreneurs who lack access to traditional bank loans. By supporting only women's groups, we help them work together, repay loans, and build independence. Every repaid loan is reinvested in new female entrepreneurs, multiplying our impact. Since 2008, our initial \$475 has grown into \$4,475 in loans, supporting 145 groups and touching 1,233 lives across 38 countries. From education and agriculture to health care and bakeries, we're making a real difference. **Be part of the change—support Kiva and help women thrive!**

Go to:

<https://www.kiva.org>

## SI Thunder Bay Inducts new member

Submitted by Lee-Ann Nalezty

At our latest club meeting, SI Thunder Bay was thrilled to welcome another dynamic new member to our soroptimist family: Emily, a registered nurse, and Luci, a talented carpenter joined last year. Lucy recruited Emily. The club is genuinely excited to have these two young, enthusiastic women join our ranks. Their energy, fresh perspectives, and commitment to making a difference are already inspiring us all. We look forward to seeing the positive impact Emily and Luci will bring to our projects and community initiatives as they embark on their journey as soroptimists.





We are pleased to share with you highlights from the 2024-2025 fiscal year reflected in the infographic below. Join us at the upcoming Foundation Annual General Meeting taking place 11 am Pacific Time Saturday October 25th 2025 to hear first hand about the successes achieved.

## 2024 - 2025 YEAR IN REVIEW

### BRAND RECOGNITION

Increased awareness through:

**SOCIAL  
MEDIA**

**IN-PERSON  
PRESENTATIONS**

**SOROPTIMIST ACROSS  
CANADA NEWSLETTER**

### COMMUNICATIONS

- launched a modern, user-friendly website
- increased social media engagement & reach

### SUCCESSION PLANNING

- Proactive recruitment and promotion of board member opportunities
- Board training and development
- Dedicated Nomination Committee

### FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT AND PHILANTHROPY

<b>43%</b> increase in donations	Grants for Women	<b>\$68,000</b>
<b>\$135,000</b> invested in programs supporting 800-1,000 women and girls	Live Your Dream	<b>\$37,000</b>
	Willing Hearts Int'l Society Canada	<b>\$17,000</b>
	Club Grants	<b>\$13,000</b>

### VALUE ADDED IMPACT

Virtual Planned Giving session delivered by former Board Member Wendy Templeton

# Regional Teams

## Western Canada Board 2024–2026

**Governor:**

Chari Grant (SI Tri Cities)

**Governor-Elect:**

Shirley Stewart (SI Langleys)

**Treasurer:**

Lana Deruyter (SI Chilliwack)

**Secretary:**

Shelley DellaMattia (SI Langleys)

**Member-at-Large:**

Pamela MacDonald ((SI Canada West Online

**Parliamentarian:**

Dana Martin (SI Chilliwack)

## 2024-2026 Committee Chairs

**Membership:**

Colleen Penrowley (SI Tri Cities) &  
Heather Rollins (SI Chilliwack)

**Public Awareness:**

Chyler Webb (CW Online)

**Fundraising:**

Rhona Beaumont & Sandra Sterling Weicker (SI Victoria Westshore)

**Program:**

Colleen Schmidt (SI Abbotsford-Mission), Melanie Kenney (SI Saskatoon), LYD Colleen Beresh (SI Saskatoon), DIBI Ching Shih (SI Canada West Online)

**Celebrating Success:**

Megan Eastwood (SI Tri Cities)

**Advocacy:**

Carrell Wingrave (SI Canada West Online)

**Friendship:**

Darlene Jamieson (SI Surrey Delta)

## Eastern Canada Board 2024–2026

**Governor:**

Cheryl Ball (SI Thunder Bay)

**Governor-Elect:**

Keshala Fernando-Dissanayake (SI Cambridge)

**Treasurer:**

Karen Bortolin (SI Thunder Bay)

**Secretary:**

Aline Chan (SI Guelph)

**Director:**

Raheleh Barkhordari (SI Toronto)

**Director:**

TBD

**Past Governor:**

Gertrud Hocke (SI Cambridge)

## 2024-2026 Committee Chairs

**Membership:**

Dianne Nielsen (SI Peterborough)

**Public Awareness:**

Tanna Edwards (SI Peterborough)

**Fundraising:**

Gertrud Hocke (SI Cambridge)

**Program:**

LYD Vacant

DIBI Keshala Fernando-Dissanayake (SI Cambridge)

**Laws & Resolutions:**

RoseMary Reid (SI York Region)

**United Nations:**

**Newsletter Team:**

Lee-Ann Nalezty (SI Thunder Bay)

Colleen Penrowley (SI Tri Cities)

Dianne Nielsen (SI Peterborough)

Jayne Carre (SI Edmonton)

Some submissions in this issue were edited and/or adapted with the help of Microsoft Co pilot. Each article's original contributor is credited at the top of their piece.