

# YORK U LEGACIES 2019



## Inside:

- Keeping Her Spirit Alive
- A Legacy of Athletic Excellence
- Improve Your Finances through Philanthropy and more

YORK  
UNIVERSITÉ  
UNIVERSITY



# Letter from the President



Rhonda L. Lenton

I am pleased to share the latest issue of York U Legacies, our annual update on legacy giving at York University.

Our 200-strong legacy donors are special members of York's White Rose Legacy Circle. Their generosity and foresight allow us to plan for a future in which we realize our bold vision of providing a diverse student body access to a high-quality, research-intensive learning environment committed to the public good. Legacy donors often invest in programs and initiatives at the University that are close to their heart and reflect a deep understanding of the profound difference education can make in someone's life.

The stories in this issue of York U Legacies speak to this truth. They also demonstrate how our community members are working together to advance the four fundamental pillars that are building York University's future: access, connectedness, excellence and impact.

This year we will celebrate York's 60th anniversary. During this wonderful milestone in our history, there will be many opportunities to take stock of all that we have accomplished together, and to look ahead to a promising future for the University.

I look forward to celebrating with you.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Rhonda L. Lenton'.

Rhonda L. Lenton  
President and Vice-Chancellor

We are proud to share that **Impact: The Campaign for York University** has raised a total of \$400 million toward our ambitious \$500 million fundraising goal. This funding has allowed us to not only realize our vast potential, but also to provide critical student financial support, establish transformative learning experiences, advance innovative faculty research and much more.



Alexandria Town hopes to represent Canada in the 2020 Olympics.

## Mary Lyons leaves a legacy of athletic excellence

**"Receiving the Mary Lyons Award lifted a huge weight off my shoulders." – Alexandria Town**

When you watch world-class athletes performing feats of outstanding strength, dexterity and strategic thinking, the excellence you witness is the culmination of superb coaching, dogged practice, and often financial support that frees them to concentrate on perfecting their skills. This certainly is the story of recent York Kinesiology graduate and outstanding athlete Alexandria Town (BSc'18).

One of York's most decorated women's athletes, Town honed her wrestling skills figuratively standing on the shoulders of a woman she never met — Professor Mary Lyons, one of York

University's Athletics builders.

In 1967, York hired Lyons as the inaugural Coordinator of Women's Interuniversity Sport. Through her leadership she grew the program from six to 14 sports by her retirement in 1993, and helped York establish one of the best reputations in women's university sport.

Jennifer Myers, York's Director of Sport and Recreation, says "Mary's work formed the basis of the sport system we have in place today. She will always be an integral part of the fabric of sport at York."



Mary Lyons

During Lyons's tenure, she was the academic advisor, coach and confidant to thousands of student-athletes. Later she reflected, "I recognized how many students made sacrifices to complete their education, fitting in academics, athletics, and often part-time jobs."

After Lyons retired, she wanted to continue to have an impact on students' lives. With assistance from a financial advisor, she bought a \$87,000 life insurance policy and made York its beneficiary. Upon her passing in 2014, her policy had grown to \$144,365. Following her wishes, the funds were endowed to form the Mary Lyons Excellence Award in support of high performance student-athletes.

Alexandria Town is one of many Mary Lyons Excellence Award recipients. She is an outstanding wrestler on Canada's women's wrestling team, winning multiple international medals including Canada's first gold at the U23 World Championships. "The training and support I received from York's athletic

community was exactly what I needed to reach this elite level of competition," Town admits.

"Having to finance my own education was extremely taxing, so receiving the Mary Lyons Excellence Award lifted a huge weight off my shoulders and allowed me to focus on my

training. I'm extremely grateful for this help. **I hope to repay Mary's generosity by representing Canada at the 2020 Olympics!"**



Sophie Bisson was moved by meeting Farrokh Eshragi who helped fund the Sunnuz Sarah Taheri Graduate Award she received.

## Keeping Her Spirit Alive

Sunnuz Sarah Taheri was a vibrant, charming young artist who expressed her passions through singing, poetry, painting and other visual arts. She took an active role in furthering women's rights, protecting the environment, politics, philosophy, her community and society, and the plight of the poor.

Taheri completed a BA in English at York in 2005, although she loved her vocal jazz courses and singing classical, blues, soul and hip hop most of all. She hoped to study opera singing at Juilliard one day. Yet in 2013, at age 32, she died unexpectedly.

"Her death was tragic, and the greatest shock our

family ever endured," says her uncle, Farrokh Eshragi.

"The idea of creating a York University music scholarship in Sunnuz's name came to us within a day or two after her passing. It was like lighting a small candle in the middle of the darkness that had befallen our family. We were inspired by the idea of keeping her spirit alive in this way; allowing what she might have enjoyed to continue on through others.

"Everyone in our family plus our friends and colleagues wanted to make it happen," explains Eshragi. Through personal donations and a fundraising concert, \$100,000 was raised, then doubled by a 2014 Graduate



Studies Award Program. York University endowed the funds to create the Sunnuz Sarah Taheri Graduate Award.

“This annual \$5,000 award will help relieve some of the financial burden for outstanding students in the graduate fine arts program,” said Eshragi. “We hope this scholarship will help the students to dedicate more of their time to their work and feel less of the obstacles and difficulties that they might otherwise experience.”

The first student award recipient is Sophie Bisson, an opera singer and third year PhD student in musicology. Her doctoral work focusses on the musical lineage and legacy of Italian-Canadian soprano Lina Riccoboni Narducci (1915-1997).

The Sunnuz Sarah Taheri Graduate Award helped Bisson pay for membership fees to organizations related to her field of research as well as attend and present her work at out of town conferences where she made important connections with other students and scholars.

Bisson was particularly moved to meet Farrokh Eshragi and Sunnuz’s mother, Nazila Taheri. “I am grateful that this wonderful family valued my



Sunnuz Sarah Taheri

**“Our family’s award removes one piece of rock in front of the foot of students trying to walk a difficult path.”**

– Farrokh Eshragi

research. Meeting with them and making a personal connection was incredibly moving,” says Bisson. “I hope my work lives up to their gift but, mostly, I hope they find comfort in each year’s recipient and the legacy they are creating.”



Sophie Bisson and Farrokh Eshragi

# Engineering Possibilities that Connect Newcomers to Canada



As an executive managing fraud detection solutions for global firms, Sonja Schindeler has spent a fair amount of time in taxis.

While in them, she would often talk to the drivers, many of whom were new immigrants. Listening to their stories, she was struck by a common refrain: Many had been trained as engineers in their native countries, but their credentials didn't qualify them to continue their careers in Canada. They drove cabs to make ends meet, and to give their families a chance at having a good life in their adopted land.

**"It was heart-wrenching to hear what these people gave up to help their families. That's when we started thinking about what we could do to help." – Sonja Schindeler**

Schindeler and her husband, Rick Hrga, himself an immigrant who knows firsthand what it is like to struggle for acceptance in a new country, decided that a better way might be to offer a new opportunity for foreign-trained engineers to succeed in Canada.

"I met so many people working hard to give their kids an education, often sacrificing their own professional

dreams," says Schindeler.

Hrga came to Canada from Austria in 1958 at the age of 19 with \$40 in his pocket. He trained in mechanical engineering at a technical school in Vienna, but after immigrating to Ontario, he worked as a manual labourer in various industries.

While working, Hrga attended school part-time to improve his English and academic qualifications, enrolling at York's Atkinson

College as a mature student. Soon after, he started an electric motor manufacturing company, which was later acquired by Magna International. At Magna, Hrga rose quickly through the ranks to become a group president.

It's a true immigrant struggle and success story, and it has inspired Hrga to want to help other newcomer professionals get ahead in Canada.

In June 2017, the couple made a future bequest to York University's Lassonde School of Engineering to establish the Sonja Schindeler and Rick Hrga Fund for Internationally Educated Engineers. The gift will enable foreign-qualified engineers to get the specific training they need to ensure their academic and professional credentials meet Canadian engineering licensing requirements.

"I've always had an appreciation for people who've devoted their careers to the engineering discipline. It's worked out well for me, but it was difficult to get here - coming to Canada, not speaking English and working my way up," Hrga says. "I'd like to make it just a bit easier for new engineer immigrants to succeed."

The simple act of connecting with cab drivers inspired a meaningful gift that will help the next generation of diverse, internationally trained engineers work and thrive in Canada and have an even greater impact on the world.

# Improve Your Finances through Philanthropy



When people understand they won't run out of money — in fact, they will probably have more of it when they die than they have today — they realize the need to minimize future taxes now, keeping money in the family instead of remitting it to the tax department.

Oftentimes this “never spend” money can be used to preserve wealth for their family and charities they are passionate about.

**There's another great reason to give: it lowers your tax bills.** There are many ways to be generous: a bequest gift where you name a charity in your Will, make the charity a beneficiary of your RRSP/RRIF, donate marketable securities or give life insurance.

**Life Insurance** — Most people think the only benefit from a life insurance policy occurs when they die. This example illustrates how you can benefit from life insurance today:

*Harold, a retired accountant in his mid-60s had a \$500,000 life insurance policy he didn't need and wanted to donate it to his alma mater. An independent actuary determined its current value at \$290,000. Harold transferred ownership of the policy to his university, received a charitable donation receipt for the entire \$290,000 value, and saved about \$145,000 in taxes.*

Going forward, if Harold continues to pay the insurance premiums he will also receive charitable tax receipts for the annual amounts paid, lowering his future taxes.

**Stocks and Securities** — If you have invested in the stock markets over the past 10 to 15 years, you undoubtedly have some appreciated securities with high taxable gains. Simply donate some of those shares and receive a charitable receipt for their full value and pay zero capital gains taxes.

**RRSPs and RRIFs** — If you are single, divorced, widowed or never married, the tax department will scoop up to 54 per cent of your RRSP or RRIF savings when you die, and probate fees can gobble up another 1.5 per cent in Ontario. If you designate a charity as the beneficiary of some or all of your RRSP or RRIF, you can effectively eliminate the tax liability.

**Create Your Own Family Legacy** — Donating to favourite charities can be emotionally fulfilling and financially rewarding, reducing your current or future tax load. It can also enable you to save more for those near and dear to you while creating a family legacy that will carry your name for many years to come.



**Mark Halpern (BA'83)** is one of Canada's top life insurance advisors, a Certified Financial Planner (CFP), Trust and Estate Practitioner (TEP) and CEO of WEALTHinsurance.com®.

*This is an edited version of an article that was originally published in the January 2019 issue of The TaxLetter®*

# An Impact on Roses and Students

Defying all odds, Dr. Felicitas Svejda made the impossible *possible*.

By applying single-minded intensity to scientific experimentation, she created 25 breeds of roses that thrive in areas that experience average winter temperatures of -30 to -50 degrees. Her hearty and beautiful roses, each named after explorers of northern Canada, bloom throughout summer, resist disease and insects, and grow fuller each year.

**"I greatly enjoyed my work with roses, and I am very happy that people around the globe enjoy cultivating and looking at the Explorers" – Dr. Felicitas Svejda**

Originally from Vienna where she earned her PhD in Agricultural Science, Dr. Svejda migrated to Ottawa in 1960. Working for 25 years with the Federal Department of Agriculture's Central Experimental Farm, she led the rose breeding program.

Remarkably, she began knowing nothing about roses. Tapping the knowledge of experts while thinking scientifically and creatively, she became a global expert on hybridization - breeding different varieties of plants together to create new stronger breeds. Today, Dr. Svejda's Explorer roses are treasured around the world.



Agricultural Scientist, Dr. Felicitas Svejda (1920-2016)  
© Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada / Government of Canada

In 2000, Dr. Svejda was deeply touched by receiving an honorary degree of Doctor of Science *honoris causa* from York University, whose crest features the White Rose of York, akin to her Henry Hudson hybrid rose. In 2007, she graciously returned to York to consult on Glendon's Bruce Bryden Rose Garden. Today, her roses are featured there, and in the Harry Arthurs Common at York's Keele campus.

Shortly after her passing in 2016, York learned Dr. Svejda had left an undesignated \$300,000 gift to York University in her Will. To honour her, part of her bequest will support entrance bursaries in her name for Glendon's Science students studying biology. The balance is helping us to restore and repair Glendon's rose garden.

**Dr. Svejda's remarkable impact and generosity will live on, through her Canadian Explorer roses and her support of students, sparking the passion and curiosity of budding biologists.**

If you've already remembered York in your Will or by beneficiary designation, please let me know so I can invite you to the **White Rose Legacy Circle Afternoon Tea** on May 22, 2019. Thank You.



**Marisa Barlas**  
Senior Development Officer, Gift Planning

Division of Advancement  
West Office Building  
York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3

Tel.: 416-736-2100 ext. 33191  
Fax: 416-650-8220  
legacy@yorku.ca  
[myyorklegacy.com](http://myyorklegacy.com)  
Charitable Registration Number / BN: 11930 6736 RR0001