

President's Message – May 2014

Another productive semester at the University of Regina has come to a close and many on campus are busily preparing for the 2014 Spring Convocation ceremonies, which will take place June 4-6 at the Conexus Arts Centre.

Convocation is an exciting time because it is an opportunity to officially recognize our graduating students and celebrate their academic achievements. This Convocation is particularly special because it is a milestone – the 40th Spring Convocation in the University of Regina's history. It is fitting, then, that as we recognize our students' accomplishments, we also bestow the University's highest honor on four people who have made a longstanding impact on our province over the past four decades – our honorary degree recipients.

This year's honorary degree recipients have not only excelled in their individual fields, but have also made significant contributions to our local community, and our province as a whole.

Jean Freeman will be awarded an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts at Convocation on June 6. Ms. Freeman, who was born in Weyburn, Saskatchewan, credits her nearly eight-decade career as a performer, writer, director and communicator to her love of make believe. She recalls that before even starting school, she was roping the neighborhood children into performing for her playground plays.

As a performer herself, Ms. Freeman was one of the first members of the Saskatchewan branch of the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists (ACTRA), and was honoured as ACTRA's Woman of the Year in 2014. She has performed on radio, in films, and has received a great deal of recognition for her cameo role on the TV series *Corner Gas*.

Ms. Freeman has also enjoyed a long career as a writer and communicator. She had a hand in the development of the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild, worked at the Saskatchewan Arts Board helping to establish the first Arts Councils in communities around the province, and worked in management positions in public relations and employee communication. In 1995, she founded SpeakEasy Enterprises, as a writer, performer and speaker-coach.

Ms. Freeman also represented the Canadian Public Relations Society on the University of Regina Senate for two terms, and was instrumental in establishing the University's certificate program in Public Relations. More recently, she has been collecting and preserving stories about the history and development of the College Avenue campus, including Darke Hall.

Ted Jaleta will receive an honorary Doctor of Laws at Convocation on June 4. Mr. Jaleta was born into a farm family in Dangur, Ethiopia. His early schooling took place in a mud hut with 140 other students. After graduating from high school, he studied graphic arts at Kenya Polytechnic in Nairobi, Kenya.

An avid runner, Mr. Jaleta joined a track club and had dreams of competing at the Olympics. However, after attending a political demonstration with other students, he spent time in prison, and then lived for four years in a refugee camp in Sudan. He eventually escaped to Kenya, and in 1982 applied and was accepted to move to Canada, becoming a Canadian citizen in 1985.

Over the years, Mr. Jaleta has retained his love for running. He coached the men's and women's track and field and cross-country teams at the University of Regina from 2004 to 2007. He also coaches the Jaleta Pacers Running Group, a distance running club with members at all levels of ability. They participate in various fundraising activities to assist Saskatchewan children and youth to overcome barriers, and support leadership opportunities for the disadvantaged.

In 1997, Mr. Jaleta was ranked seventh in the world in the Masters Division for distance running by Runners World magazine, and was named SaskSport Master Athlete of the Year. He was inducted into the Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame in 2005. In 2010, near Swift Current, Saskatchewan, he fulfilled his dream of carrying the Olympic torch.

Mr. Jaleta has also been a recipient of the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal.

Ken Mitchell will be presented with an honorary Doctor of Letters at Convocation on June 5 – the first time in the University of Regina's history that someone will receive this particular honour. Mr. Mitchell is Professor Emeritus of English at the University of Regina, and during his decades-long career here, he taught a range of courses from introductory English literature to creative writing workshops, as well as honours and graduate classes in Canadian literature.

Mr. Mitchell retired from teaching at the University in 2005, but continues to write, and to perform cowboy poetry, which goes back to his roots on the family farm south of Moose Jaw.

Mr. Mitchell studied Journalism at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, and after working as a reporter, returned to school and received his Master's degree in English from the University of Saskatchewan – Regina Campus. He began teaching at the University in 1967. He served as director of creative writing at the Saskatchewan Summer School of the Arts from 1970 to 1975, and has played an active role in many writers' institutions provincially, nationally and internationally. Along with fellow honorary degree recipient Jean Freeman, he played a role in establishing the Saskatchewan Writers' Guild. He has authored an impressive list of books, poetry collections, stage plays, radio productions, film scripts, lectures and papers, many of which are anchored in Prairie history and culture.

Among his other honours, Mr. Mitchell has received the Saskatchewan Order of Merit and the Order of Canada. He has also received a University of Regina Alumni Association Award for Excellence in Research.

William (Bill) Shurniak will receive an honorary Doctor of Laws at Convocation on June 4. Mr. Shurniak was born on the family farm at Limerick, Saskatchewan. After high school he joined the Imperial Bank of Canada (now CIBC) as a junior clerk in Assiniboia. During his 35-year banking career, he worked at various locations in Canada, including the bank's head office

in Toronto. He spent two years as manager of the bank's main office in Kingston, Jamaica, and then transferred to Hong Kong, where he headed the CIBC's operations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Mr. Shurniak left the bank to become executive director and chief financial officer of Hutchison Whampoa, a Hong Kong-based conglomerate with operations in more than 50 countries. He retired in 1997, but moved to Adelaide, South Australia a few years later to become chairman and director of three electric distribution companies.

After spending 28 years working overseas, he moved back to Canada and took up residence on the family farm at Limerick. Coincident with that move, he was appointed chairman and director of Northern Gas Networks Ltd., a distributor of natural gas in northern England. Mr. Shurniak has served on the advisory board of the Richard Ivey School of Business (at Western University), as director of the Trans Canada Trail, and as a trustee of the Saskatchewan Foundation for the Arts.

His lifelong passion for art is well-documented. He built the Shurniak Art Gallery in Assiniboia to house his growing art collection, and also to give something back to his home province. He was awarded the Saskatchewan Centennial Medal when the Gallery opened in 2005, and he continues to donate his time to its daily operations.

Mr. Shurniak has received honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Western Ontario (now Western University), the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal, and the Saskatchewan Order of Merit. He continues to serve as a director of Hutchison Whampoa Ltd. and as director and deputy chairman of Husky Energy Inc.

As you can see, our Spring 2014 honorary degree recipients are an incredibly accomplished group. They will serve as an inspiration to our graduating students, and I will be proud to officially celebrate their achievements – and those of our students – at Convocation in early June.

Sincerely,

Vianne Timmons
President and Vice-Chancellor