

MHR Connections

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THE MANITOBA
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DU MANITOBA

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Commissioner Invested into the Order of Manitoba

Newly appointed Human Rights Commissioners Ajit Kaur Deol was one of twelve Manitobans invested into the Order of Manitoba, the province's highest honour. A ceremony was held on July 15 at the Manitoba Legislative Building. Mrs. Deol received the insignia of the Order and is entitled to use the initials O.M. after her name for life.



Mrs. Deol, who immigrated to Canada in 1967, is credited with developing the Caroline McMorland School for the Mentally Handicapped in Marathon, Ontario, from a church basement operation. This program is now integrated into the local high school system.

In 1975 she and her family moved to Beausejour where they operated a farm and became active in the community. She continued as a resource teacher in Beausejour and then at

Maple Collegiate until 1991.

Mrs. Deol has received other honours and awards in the past. They include Outstanding Community Service Award, Recognition of Service Award and an Award Celebrating the 100th anniversary of Sikhs in Canada.

MHRC Supports Extension of Property Laws to Common-law Couples

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission has announced that it is pleased that the Manitoba Government introduced legislation to extend family property laws to common-law couples, whether of the same or opposite sex.

"We urged the Government last year to amend a number of statutes with respect to family property so as to extend rights and responsibilities to common-law couples," said Janet Baldwin, Commission Chairperson. "We are pleased that these amendments include laws that determine the division of property on the breakdown of a relationship or the death of a common-law partner."

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The Rights Connection The Choice to Marry By Janet Baldwin Chairperson

We have said it before, but it bears repeating. Much discrimination faced by gay men and lesbians flows from the denial to same-sex couples of the choice to marry. It is disheartening, then, that the federal government has appealed the Halpern decision of the Ontario Divisional Court, which held that it is unconstitutional to bar same-sex couples from marrying.

In the earlier EGALE case (also under Appeal), Mr. Justice Pitfield of the British Columbia Supreme Court found that restricting same-sex couples from marrying was discrimination under Section 15 of The Charter - but was saved by Section 1. We view this restriction as both discriminatory and an unreasonable and unjustifiable limit in a free and democratic society. We do, however, agree with his observation that this bar to same-sex couples from marrying "excludes (them) from a social and legal institution of considerable importance and tends to perpetuate the stereotypical and frequently critical community view of gays and lesbians."

Manitoba has moved forward with legislation that addresses a number of issues of discrimination on the basis of marital or family status, and sexual orientation. These amendments go far towards eliminating the systemic discrimination that common-law partners, and in particular, same-sex common-law partners, have faced.

We commend the Government of Manitoba for advancing equality rights, and hope that this restructuring of statutes that apply to conjugal and family relationships will serve as its foundation for a commitment to end discrimination in marriage laws. We urge Manitoba to declare its support for the Halpern decision, to intervene in support of the applicants should these cases proceed to the Supreme Court, and to encourage the Federal Government to act immediately to end discrimination in the laws governing marriage.

Seminars Updated and Re-Vamped

The Commission's highly successful seminars, which are available to the public, will continue throughout the fall of 2002 and the winter and spring of 2003.

Throughout the summer, the staff at the Commission has been working on updating the full day *Employment Seminar*. The totally re-vamped seminar will provide participants with the most up-to-date information on human rights in employment. This continues to be one of the most popular seminars offered by the Commission.

During the *Employment Seminar*, participants discuss such topics as - what discrimination is, the concept of reasonable accommodation, harassment in the workplace, pre-employment inquiries, and how the Commission processes complaints. Human Rights Officers lead the discussions.

The fee for attending this seminar is \$75.00 and is for cost recovery purposes only. A lunch and two lifestyle breaks are included.

Another workshop, offered again this fall and also totally revamped and updated, is *Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace*. This is a three and one half-hour seminar, which considers when employers have a duty to take reasonable steps to accommodate employees. It offers practical advice to employers to help them deal with this difficult area of human rights legislation.

The cost of the *Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace Seminar*, again for cost recovery purposes, is \$50.00. Lunch is included.

For those interested in attending either of these seminars, it is suggested that you book well in advance, as they are often filled to capacity. For more information call Assistant Director George Sarides at 945-5815 or Toll Free 1-888-884-8681. Or email the Commission at hrc@gov.mb.ca.

Reasonable Accommodation in the Workplace Seminar

Sept. 24, 2002 9 AM - 12:30 PM
7th Floor 175 Hargrave Street

Employment Seminar

Oct. 30, 2002 8:30 AM - 4:00 PM
Norwood Hotel, 112 Marion Street

A Celebration of Progress in Accessible Design

Last June 17, on behalf of the Access Advisory Committee, Mayor Glen Murray and Councillor Jenny Gerbasi congratulated recipients of the first Winnipeg Business Accessibility Award. The Winnipeg Business Accessibility Award is intended to raise awareness about the importance of accessibility in the City of Winnipeg and its role in making life more equitable, safe, comfortable and affordable for everyone including people with disabilities.

The organizing committee was led by the Access Advisory Committee of the City of Winnipeg and the Canadian Paraplegic Association in cooperation with the Universal Design Institute, Handi - Transit, SMD Abitech and The Manitoba Human Rights Commission. The Winnipeg Free Press and the Access Advisory Committee sponsored the event.

The award went to businesses that are exemplary in creating an accessible environment through good design.

In the category of "renovation" the Winnipeg Airports Authority Inc. encouraged full participation with Braille and sound in their elevators, pay telephones for deaf and hearing impaired people, strobe fire alarms, safety markings and textures on stairs, detectable warning surfaces at grade changes plus many more features.

In the category of "new construction" the Wellness Institute and their architect, Smith Carter Architects and Engineers Inc., worked very hard in providing an inclusive facility. Just some of the design elements include accessible family change rooms, sound cues at the entrance hall, accessible exercise stations, tactile signage on public doors, an accessible pool and change rooms along with lowered reception counters.

Next year The Access Advisory Committee hopes to expand the categories to include landscape, small businesses and government projects.

Mayor Glen Murray and Councillor Jenny Gerbasi give the Winnipeg Business Accessibility Award to the Winnipeg Airports authority and the Wellness Institute and their architect Smith Carter Architects and Engineers.



Property Laws continued from Page 1

The Bill includes a scheme of registration that would permit common-law couples, both same and opposite sex, to enjoy similar property rights to married couples without having to meet a set period of cohabitation. Ms Baldwin noted that the need for such a registration scheme would be less pressing if same-sex couples were allowed to marry. "We welcome last week's decision of the Ontario Superior Court which held that Canada's current definition of marriage is unconstitutional in excluding same-sex couples," she said. "I hope that this issue will be settled in the very near future by legislation or by an immediate reference to the Supreme Court of Canada."

The Common-Law Partners' Property and Related Amendments Act introduced in July follows The Charter Compliance Bill introduced earlier this session. That Act proposed a number of other amendments that affect common-law couples, including changes to The Adoption Act that permit same-sex common-law partners to jointly adopt a child.