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42ND ANNUAL VOLUNTEER AWARDS

APRIL 30, 2026 - 5PM

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CINDY BELL - 2025 LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR'S
COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP AWARD RECIPIENT

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Tonight we celebrate these outstanding individuals and community groups for their achievements, their dedication to the community we share and their excellence in volunteerism.

Congratulations to the recipients and nominees of
the 42nd Annual Volunteer Awards!

Lieutenant Governor's Community Leadership Award

Paige Paupanakis (Youth)

Paige is an inspiring and compassionate young leader who has already made a profound impact on her community and beyond. Known for her initiative and selflessness, she consistently steps up to support others—whether organizing fundraisers, coordinating donations, or volunteering during emergencies in Pimicikamak Cree Nation and Cross Lake. She has also contributed her time to wellness initiatives in Winnipeg and proudly represented Manitoba as an athlete.

A strong advocate for youth, Paige ensures their voices are heard at all levels, even engaging with provincial leadership to drive meaningful change. Mentored by respected leaders, she continues to grow while uplifting those around her. Paige leads with humility, never seeking recognition, yet inspiring people of all ages through her dedication, kindness, and determination. With a bright future ahead, she is a powerful voice for her generation and a champion for her community.

Mary-Ann Playford (Northern)

Mary-Ann has dedicated nearly five decades to education, disability advocacy, and the preservation of Northern Manitoba's

history. A respected teacher in Northern communities including Cranberry Portage, she was known for mentoring students of all ages with care and commitment. After becoming deaf in the early 1980s, Mary-Ann redirected her path toward advocacy, developing an adult deaf-education program that gained recognition beyond Manitoba.

Her passion for history led her to found the Cranberry Portage Heritage Museum, where she has served for over 25 years as a volunteer curator, manager, and educator. She played a central role in restoring the 1929 Canadian National Railway Station, transforming it into a vibrant museum and community hub. Through archival work, exhibit development, and community partnerships, she has preserved thousands of stories and artifacts. Now in her 80s, Mary-Ann continues to inspire through her leadership, ensuring that the history and identity of her community are protected for generations to come.

Susan Witherly (Urban)

Susan is a dedicated and compassionate community volunteer who has spent 15 years supporting children and families through the Spence Neighbourhood Association's Building Belonging program in Winnipeg. Volunteering weekly, she plays many roles—from program support and mentorship to leading activities in art, sports, and as an in-house Taekwondo

instructor. Her commitment extends beyond the program, helping children feel safe, supported, and connected both in and out of the community. Susan has also contributed to community development through the Environment and Open Spaces Committee, fostering collaboration through gardening and neighbourhood initiatives. As a former facilitator and board member with Circles for Reconciliation, she helped create meaningful dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. As a Geography and Information scientist, Susan inspires curiosity through STEM programming and mentorship, particularly for girls and gender-diverse youth. Her long-term dedication has made her a trusted mentor and a lasting, positive influence in the lives of countless young people.

Elaine Hofer (Rural)

Elaine is a dedicated and compassionate community volunteer whose commitment spans over 20 years. Passionate about education, sustainability, and supporting others, she has contributed in countless ways—teaching art, supervising summer camps, volunteering at the Brandon Soup Kitchen, organizing fundraisers and clothing drives, and helping her community maintain local trails. Her leadership and creativity bring people together, inspiring children and adults alike to engage, learn, and care for their surroundings. Elaine has also played a key role in cultural and social initiatives. She helped Syrian newcomers settle in Manitoba by sewing clothing and bedding for women and children, donating furniture, providing mentorship and support to navigate their new community, and fostering deep connections that continue to

this day. She founded the annual Hutterite Run, raising funds for the local soup kitchen while promoting community wellness and participation. Currently pursuing secondary education at Brandon University, Elaine combines her natural empathy, dedication, and innovative spirit to make a lasting impact. Her selfless efforts enrich her community, empowering children, families, and neighbours while cultivating connection, understanding, and joy.

Premier's Volunteer Service Award

Emily Jochelson (Youth)

Emily is a Grade 11 student at Balmoral Hall School whose dedication to volunteerism spans school, community, and youth-focused programs. Balancing a full academic load, including three Advanced Placement courses, Emily has contributed over 500 volunteer hours in the past two years alone. Her commitment is marked by both consistency and impact, supporting children, peers, and the broader community with creativity, empathy, and leadership.

Emily serves as a Volunteer Camp Counsellor with the Winnipeg Humane Society, mentoring children through structured programs while adapting activities to ensure inclusion and engagement. She contributes to the Winnipeg Fringe Festival and Teddy Bears' Picnic, supporting logistics, ticketing, and patron experiences. Within Balmoral Hall, she strengthens student life as a mentor in debate, robotics, and arts programming, applying videography, editing, and organizational skills to enhance school initiatives. Her dedication, initiative, and care

Introducing Your Hosts

Maralee Caruso

Maralee is **CTV Winnipeg's Senior News Anchor**, hosting both CTV News at 5 and CTV News at 6.

Originally from Thunder Bay, Ontario, Maralee began her broadcasting career as a reporter at TBT News and joined CTV Winnipeg in 2001. As a journalist for over 29 years, Maralee has covered breaking news stories, civic, provincial and federal elections, and keeps Manitobans up to date on current community events in our cities and our province.

Maralee is a strong advocate for several community organizations including The Winnipeg Humane Society where she adopted her best friend "Jack", The Salvation Army, Variety Manitoba, Canadian Blood Services and more. In 2018, Maralee launched the Hero in You campaign, an annual November blood drive for Canadian Blood Services, raising awareness and new donors. This cause affected Maralee personally in 2016 when she lost her mother to a rare form of blood cancer.

When not anchoring the news or helping in the community, you will find Maralee in her garden or cheering on her two sons who are accomplished wrestlers honing their skills at the National Training Centre in Montreal in pursuit of the upcoming Olympic Games.

Rachel Lagacé

Rachel Lagacé is **the host of Your Morning Winnipeg on CTV**. This is a role Rachel has been doing for more than four years. She sets her alarm clock for 2:08 am to get ready and get to work for her 4 am shift. It might sound crazy, but she loves getting a head start on her day and being the first to tell people what's going on in the community and around the world!

Before becoming host of the show, Rachel reported on breaking news and community events since the morning show's inception in 2011. Her time at CTV began in December 2002, where she worked as a reporter for more than 10 years for CTV News at 6 before moving to the morning show. Rachel's first job in journalism began at PGTV in Prince George, BC in August 2001 where she learned the importance of local news. She's been a journalist for almost 25 years and calls herself a news junkie!

She grew up in the community of La Salle just outside of Winnipeg in a francophone family



and spoke French before English. Rachel wanted to be a journalist since the age of 9 and loves telling the stories of people and events in her community. She's married with a son named Maxim and a daughter Zoé and is a proud francophone instilling her love of the language in her children.

Rachel is an avid reader and enjoys a good book on a beach anywhere.

Celebrating Volunteers in Our Communities!

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