

# Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa, A Teacher's Legacy

by Jane Barry, The Greater Saint John Community Foundation

The year after Kennebecasis Valley High opened, Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa crossed its threshold and began leaving an impact on its students which continues today. It's quite uncommon for former students to retain such a positive impression of a teacher that they will dedicate substantial effort to establish a lasting legacy in her honour. Jeff McAloon, Mark Bishop, Chris Leveille and Brad Stanley feel such a tribute is well-deserved and timely.



Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa will retire this spring after thirty-five years of teaching. Many of her admirers, particularly in the Kennebecasis Valley, are hoping this means she will be able to devote even more time to the Performing and Creative Arts. She is well-known for her key roles in the production of dozens of dramatic and musical productions, the creation of several performing arts-related groups and helped in our community's being named a cultural capital.

The founding foursome of the Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa Awards took their experiences and love of the Creative and Performing Arts with them as they continued their studies and began careers, as an educator, Multimedia CEO and financial advisor. The awards concept initially arose a couple of years ago with Mark and Jeff and gathered impetus with Doyle-Yerxa's retirement around the corner. Their appreciation of the arts grew through enriching experiences under the tutelage of Mrs. Doyle-Yerxa.

That interest and an intent to pursue studies in that field will be the key elements in the selection of two KV High grads as annual winners of the \$500 awards. They have established a permanently endowed fund, entrusted to the Greater Saint John Community Foundation, launching fundraising for it last week. It will generate annual income for the awards. They hope it will inspire other supporters to contribute.

**Photo:** KV High students interested in pursuing a career in the Performing or Creative Arts can celebrate the establishment of the Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa Awards Fund, thanks to the efforts of Jeff McAloon, Mark Bishop, Chris Leveille and Brad Stanley, pictured signing the new agreement with Cheryl Robertson, Foundation Board Chair and Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa. They have benefitted as students from her commitment as a teacher and involvement in the arts as enrichment activities. Two annual awards will be made starting in 2010.

Brad Stanley is a financial planner with Sun Life, who still is actively involved in theatre. He spent fifteen years with Kids at Heart, the brainchild of Doyle-Yerxa long ago, as a fundraiser for her KV drama group. Mark Bishop comes from a family of three sons who all excelled in KV productions, in fact their Mum is sewing a dress for one their upcoming shows. The brothers later studied at Ryerson in Toronto, where Mark now makes his home and has achieved success and acclaim through his business, marbledmedia. With the help of his team, they have produced an impressive website, [www.suzannedoyleyerxa.com](http://www.suzannedoyleyerxa.com) which describes the campaign, awards and numerous tributes to their hometown teacher.

Jeff McAloon was always at the top of his class, according to his former teacher. He dreamed of becoming a neurosurgeon, says Doyle-Yerxa, but changed course, graduating from Mt. Allison in music and voice and later Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning. He now is Principal at Touchstone School in Rothesay and in his spare time away from his family, serves as the Vice-Chair of the Imperial Theatre Board. Chris Leveille studied math and theatre at Bishop's and recently graduated from Toronto's Conservatory at Second City. He has been an executive with a design firm, directed and designed for theatre and now specializes in sketch comedy and improv.

Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa clearly recalls her first day teaching thirty-five years ago and what a thrill it was. The Boston native states she still feels that sense of excitement and reward from her English and journalism teaching career today. It's obvious, given the reaction of several dozen KV students practising in the school theatre last week. When she speaks they break into applause as they learn of the planned awards and Fund in her honour. She herself says she doesn't mind speaking to a crowd of 5,000 but this is different, she is overwhelmed by emotion and the significance of her former students' admiration and efforts in her name.

The entrance of KV High proudly displays over thirty framed posters of past musicals. Some years, two musical productions were presented plus drama and then there are the KV Players, another venture into which Doyle-Yerxa devoted huge energy. The group is open to anyone in the community, offering up to three productions each summer. This spawned children's summer theatre and music camps with the added benefit of summer jobs, enrichment and related experiences, giving young people a look into the business side of the arts and career opportunities. It's no surprise that Doyle-Yerxa's daughter, Casey, and Michelle Brewer have taken over yet another initiative, Kidsing, for younger children.

Doyle-Yerxa received the 2008 Premier's Award for Excellence in Education for inspiring students in "Developing a Passion for Learning". The Committee call her "a champion for enriched education in the school system, insisting that an effective education needed to balance academic studies with extra-curricular activities emphasizing the three as Arts, Athletics and Academics". She conceived of the new "Gallery of Arts" to recognize KV grads with arts-related careers. Mark Bishop will be the first inductee. A keepsake book is being produced, recognizing donors and to be presented to Doyle-Yerxa at a special June celebration.

Community Foundation Chair Cheryl Robertson states, "The new Suzanne Doyle-Yerxa Awards Fund brings the total to forty-seven funds held within the permanent endowments of the Community Foundation, a testament to the generosity of our donors. As an educator, I admire and congratulate Mrs. Doyle Yerxa on the impact of her career on both students and our community".

To donate contact Brad Stanley: [brad.stanley@sunlife.com](mailto:brad.stanley@sunlife.com) (506) 849-1831 or online at [www.suzannedoyleyerxa.com](http://www.suzannedoyleyerxa.com) [www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca](http://www.saint-john-foundation.nb.ca)



Community Profile is a weekly column highlighting community causes and work done by non-profit organizations in the Greater Saint John area. It is contributed by Jane Barry, executive director of The Greater Saint John Community Foundation.

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