

Fundraiser Celebrates Canada's Leading Ladies

An elegant home provided an intimate setting as invited guests gathered to honour two of Canada's leading ladies at a recent fundraising event in Kelowna on October 10.

Mrs. Lauren Harper, wife of Prime Minister Steven Harper, joined Jean Paré, founder of the Company's Coming cookbooks in speaking at a "women helping women" event to raise funds for the Kelowna Women's Shelter and Women's Enterprise Centre.

Co-hosts Linda Lovig and Cindy Cannan were overjoyed at the results with over \$19,000 being raised from ticket sales, silent auction items, private donations and sponsorships. The event was a realization of their vision, "By sharing our time and financial resources as women we will help make our community a better and safer place for all."

Speaking of her admiration and personal interest in Jean Paré and her cookbooks, Lauren Harper noted that she is sharing the books with her children now that they are expressing an interest in cooking – particularly in making pies.

Everyone's heard of the Company's Coming cookbook series. With over 100 titles in print and 23 million copies sold internationally, it's a pretty safe bet you've seen one of these popular cookbooks in your local grocery store or bookstore. What you may not know is the inspiring story of its creator, Jean Paré.

In 1965, Paré's husband walked out, the mortgage company foreclosed on their home and Jean, with four children, was forced to move. One hundred percent a mother, Jean's devotion to her children never wavered. She would survive. With sheer determination she quit her job, applied for welfare, then settled her family into a tent beside a river in Vermillion, Alberta.

Always a cook, Paré admits she read cookbooks like novels. When asked to cater an event in town, she agreed and became an accidental caterer - a job that would last 18 years.

Jean always shared her recipes with anyone who asked. There was no sense of secrecy or private ownership - recipes were to be shared and enjoyed. It was not surprising that she was inspired to write her first cookbook, ***150 Delicious Squares***. The first edition, published in 1981, sold 15,000 copies and the book would go on to sell over 1,000,000 copies.

Every one of the Company's Coming cookbooks is an expression of Paré's love of simple food and the pleasure it can give. The smell of down-home cooking instantly brings memories of family meals, celebrations with friends and the joys associated with good food. That's what Paré wanted to share – good, simple food with family and friends.

The rest is history. Paré was named as a Member to the Order of Canada in 2004 and received numerous awards for Entrepreneur of the Year, Woman of Distinction and Distinguished Service. Paré's is an inspiring story of the triumph over adversity to realize dreams, no matter what.

How fitting that Jean Paré was able to be a part of this event - a single parent on welfare and jobless, who went on to build her own successful business - she was, and is, a survivor and a fine example of the power of the human spirit.

Alice Gro, board chair of the Central Okanagan Emergency Shelter Society, said, "We will be able to pay operating costs for the second stage housing facility we call WISH (Women's Interim Supportive Home). For our clients, the gift of a year of affordable, safe and supportive housing is an invaluable opportunity to rebuild their lives in a healthy manner."

Laurel Douglas, CEO of Women's Enterprise Centre said, "We were delighted to be part of this event. With our portion of the proceeds, Women's Enterprise Centre plans to provide seed money to help aboriginal, immigrant, youth and other BC women business owners to develop the confidence and leadership abilities needed to start, grow and succeed in business. It's a perfect compliment to the services we already provide."

The support and hard work of volunteers who managed everything about the event helped exceed the financial expectations. "Saturday's event proved once again that Kelowna is a very caring and compassionate community! When given an opportunity to help others, people rise to the challenge!" organizers said.

We at Women's Enterprise Centre are very grateful for the support, and for the opportunity to meet two inspiring "Leading Ladies".

You can read more about Jean Paré in her book, ***An Appetite for Life*** by Judy Schulz published in 2006 by Company's Coming Publishing Limited. Or check out her website at www.companyscoming.com.

To see photos of the event visit www.canadasleadingladies.ca.