

localnews

■ **ROLE MODEL:** Colborne woman honoured for 'conspicuous contributions to this nation'

Warren inducted into Aviation Hall

MARILYN DICKSON

RICHMOND, BC – On June 10, in a ceremony resplendent with pomp and ceremony, Vi Milstead Warren of Colborne was inducted into Canada's Aviation Hall of Fame.

The Hall of Fame is located in Wetaskiwin, Alberta but each year a ceremony is held in a different Canadian city to welcome that year's new members. The 2010 celebration in the Richmond, B.C. River Rock Casino Resort was a gala affair with most of the guests dressed in formal attire, several wearing their CAHF medals.

Following a reception, the inductees or their representatives were piped into the hall by the Vancouver Police Pipe Band and escorted to their tables by an air cadet. About 280 people involved with Canadian aviation, including members of the Ninety-Nines, an international organization of female pilots, attended the event. Several Ninety-Nines were seated at Warren's table, including Suzanne Wiltshire (chair of the First Canadian Chapter), Rosella Bjornson (the first woman in North America hired by an airline to pilot a jet), and two of Warren's friends who nominated her, Jean Franklin Hancher and myself, Marilyn Dickson.

A video had been prepared featuring the career of each inductee.

During dinner, the videos were projected onto large screens so guests got a sense of who this year's inductees are, and what each person had accomplished. Following dinner, master of ceremonies Dr. Jack McGee, president and chief executive officer of Justice Institute of B.C., a retired Colonel of Canadian Forces, a navy and air force pilot, introduced inductee representatives and Julie Payette, the only recipient in attendance.

John Holding, chair of the Board for CAHF, and Lt. Gen. Andre Deschamps, air force pilot and Chief of Air Staff for Canadian Forces, presented the CAHF medals and citation certificates.

Bill Mulock accepted the honour on behalf of his great-uncle, Redford Mulock (1886 - 1961).

Bill had never met his uncle but remembered as a teenager, seeing Redford's gun which had been mounted in his airplane. Bill complimented the Hall of Fame organizers for the outstanding work they had done, and commented that this is what makes him a proud Canadian.

Paul and Joanne Laserich accepted for their father, Willy Laserich (1932 - 2007).

Paul commented that, for his father, people always came first, to the point where, on occasion, Willy may have violated regulations in order to get passengers the medical help they so desperately needed.

Julie Payette (born 1963) is the 200th person, and the eighth woman, to be inducted into CAHF. She spoke glowingly of the privilege of seeing the beauty of the planet earth from space and of working with astronauts from several different countries on the International Space Station. She paid tribute to each of the other recipients, particularly those who had flown in war zones, Redford Mulock and Vi Milstead Warren, in order to preserve the freedom we all enjoy.

We had each been given a five-minute time limit for our acceptance speeches. In that limited time I tried to give guests a glimpse into Warren's personality during her flying days as well as now.

"Mr. Chair, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I have mixed feelings about accepting Vi Milstead Warren's honour on her behalf. I am thrilled that Vi's contribution to Canada's aviation history is being recognized by other pilots.

"I met Vi 10 years ago when she spoke at our Ninety-Nines dinner celebrating 50 years in Canada. I followed up on Vi's invitation to drop in for tea if we were in the neighbourhood. I made a point of being in her area from time to time.

"Vi is a quiet woman who speaks little of herself and her achievements. But gradually I got to know Vi and became wonderful friends. The better I got to know Vi, the more impressed I became.

"I decided that more Canadians should know about this courageous, determined



MARILYN DICKSON PHOTO

Vi Milstead Warren looks to the sky as she flies a kite outside her Colborne home.

woman and her contribution to Canada's aviation history. Today's teenagers could learn much from Vi about setting goals and then working hard to achieve them.

"Some of us women could also take a lesson from Vi in dealing with chauvinistic men who seem not to take us seriously as pilots and prefer to perpetuate old stereotypes. Vi told me about one rough-and-ready passenger who declared that he had never been kissed in the air. Vi replied, 'I have and it's no different than being kissed on the ground.'

"Though Vi didn't set out to pierce any glass ceilings, she has shown us what women pilots are capable of. During World War II, while several women tried persistently to join the RCAF, Vi instructed until there was no more fuel for civilian flying. Then she applied to Britain's ATA, which accepted men who couldn't join the Air Force because of age or disabilities, and

women. When asked why she didn't try to join the RCAF as a pilot, Vi replied, 'It's not that women aren't capable, or shouldn't do it. But there was a war on. It wasn't the time (to try to make that point).'

"Vi's flying experience permeates her life. In choosing a location to build a home, she wanted to be able to see the horizon. She and her husband bought a beautiful piece of property on Lake Ontario and had a log house built.

"I doubt that flying is ever far from her thoughts. She doesn't need to phone for a weather briefing. Looking out her front window she takes in all the clues. Vi begins her day by checking the horizon to see if it's clear or hazy, or even invisible. She also checks the water. Are the waves thrashing on the shore? Or is it a calm glassy water day? She reads the water for wind direction, no doubt anticipating how she would approach to land.

"When Vi was hospitalized

nearly two years ago, the occupational therapist tried to find a hospital program which might interest Vi. When she asked about Vi's interests, she wasn't prepared for the response: Flying.

"For Vi, bingo, music or handicrafts didn't cut it. Vi continues to show that same determination of a teenager saving her money for years and then learning to fly. At 90, she lives alone in her beautiful log home with her chocolate lab, Cleo.

"Vi continues to lead the way in other areas. A few years ago, well before governments introduced incentives to encourage people to produce their own electricity, Vi added a wind generator and solar panels to her property. Besides generating most of her electricity, she undoubtedly enjoys watching that propeller spin.

"Recently Vi has been browsing through *They Led The Way*, reading about old friends, remembering flights with Marion Orr, Molly Beall Reilly, sending Bob Fowler solo, or dancing in England with Jack Reilly on VJ Day. In this book Vi has discovered others who would have become her friends if only their paths had crossed.

"I said that I have mixed feelings about accepting this honour on Vi's behalf. I deeply regret that Vi was not able to come to this celebration so she and Julie Payette could have met. I imagine these two women would have had a wonderful conversation about leaving the earth.

"Perhaps Julie will find time to drop by Vi's for tea. I'd be happy to make tea and eavesdrop on their chat.

"On behalf of Vi I would like to thank the Hall of Fame Selection Committee for this honour. And thank you to the organizers for inviting me to accept Vi's honour in her stead. I will treasure the memory as a highlight in my aviation and writing careers."

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Warren's citation on a framed plaque reads as follows:

"In deserved recognition... of conspicuous contributions to this nation through involvement with manned flight Vi Milstead Warren, C.M. has