

New chair to health group

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Ms Kovachik-MacNeil graduated as a registered nurse in 1973 and after a stint at Toronto General Hospital, took a position on a First Nations Reserve in Cross Lake, Ontario. Other northern postings followed in Nelson House, Manitoba and Sandy Lake, Ontario.

"Sandy Lake is nearest to, but far from Red Lake," she said, remembering the feeling of working in such remote areas. "The north changed my life forever — the northern lights, and stars stretching across the sky like you have never seen."

Other northern included several in the high Arctic, where Ms Kovachik-MacNeil experienced 24 hours of sunlight and 24 hours of darkness. She flew on a medical evacuation mission with Martin Hartwell, a pilot accused of cannibalism while he clung to life after a remote plane crash, and later immortalized in a Stompin' Tom Connors song.

"People of the north have a great respect for Martin Hartwell," said Ms Kovachik-MacNeil. "In the north I have seen the tragedy of drowning and the excitement of newborns."

After a plane crashed, claiming the life of the pilot, patient and one of her colleagues Ms. Kovachik-MacNeil decided to return to her life in southern Ontario. She married Glenn MacNeil, currently a vice president of Everest Reinsurance Company, in 1988.

Now she lectures to nurses, general practitioners, interns and paramedics on assess-

ing the human body in emergency situations; and as part of on-going health maintenance. Her specialty is primary health care with a focus on wellness and preventative medicine.

According to Ms Kovachik-MacNeil nurse practitioners are likely to discuss your lifestyle in order to ascertain risk factors when assessing medical complaints.

With two sisters, Victoria McClatchie and Teresa Patafio, who are critical care nurses, Ms Kovachik-MacNeil has access to several windows on health care in Ontario.

"Canadians are looking for a holistic approach to their health care, to their wellness," she said.

"For a long time the focus was to wait until you had your first chest pain then deal with it. Now we look at how you live your life."

She explains that because people's lives and families are changed forever when they do not consider consequences of their actions on health, the focus of health care has to change.

She spoke of massive heart attacks among young men, children playing for long periods in the sun without protection, and the effects of tobacco.

Currently Ms Kovachik-MacNeil is balancing her many health-related concerns and responsibilities with the raising of her three-year-old daughter Gwyneth.

"All the scary situations I experienced in the bush are nothing like raising a child," she laughed.

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