

## Attracting the "best and brightest" part of grad's job



Eloise Wallner (BA '74)

For St. Jerome's graduate Eloise Wallner, there's no such thing as a typical day. In the hurly burly of Ontario provincial politics, life at Queen's Park in the aftermath of the June '85 election proceeds at a hectic pace and under intense public and media scrutiny.

As an Executive Assistant to Premier David Peterson, who currently heads the minority Liberal government through an accord with the New Democratic Party, Eloise is responsible for two major areas: appointments to provincial boards, agencies and commissions and the general administration of the staff in the Premier's Office.

"I've got to be ready for anything," admits Eloise, whose diminutive stature, disarming smile and genuine warmth betray none of the characteristics the general public often associates with someone who works so closely with political power. "My hours are sometimes crazy and usually very long, so my schedule has to be flexible. We're always responding to issues raised in Question Period, and there are many deadlines to make with the Cabinet meeting every Wednesday."

When the Liberals took office in June 1985, they promised to broaden representation in government administration by ensuring that "the best and the brightest" were brought into government. "The Premier made it clear that appointments would be representative of the province's demographics, ethnic minority groups, regions, Francophone and Native Ontarians and women."

This is one area where the young government has met with general approval among the media and public. It is due in no small way to Wallner's tenacity in achieving a balanced representation on provincial agencies, such as district health councils, police commissions, hospital boards, conservation authorities, the Ontario Film Review Board and many others.

"In this respect I think the Premier has accomplished what he said he would do," observes Eloise. "In fact, with the appointment of numerous Conservatives and New Democrats, he has probably received more complaints from fellow Liberals," she laughs.

Eloise maintains a talent bank and receives information on qualified persons from MPPs, the general public and through the travels of

the Premier. People even write in outlining their talents, she says.

Her path to Queen's Park can be traced largely to her ongoing interest in politics. After graduating from St. Jerome's in 1974 with a BA in French, she faced a situation not unfamiliar to university grads - she wasn't sure what she wanted to do.

So, armed with her French degree and a youthful desire to try something different, Eloise headed to Ottawa to explore job prospects in the nation's capital. While in Ottawa, she gave her local MP a call and he recommended she contact Joe Flynn, the then Liberal MP for Kitchener. Her facility with French and her knowledge of Kitchener as a student were obvious assets, and Flynn hired her. She worked with him for two years.

"This was an exciting time to be in Ottawa," she recalls. "Trudeau was Prime Minister and there was a certain electricity on Parliament Hill."

When a position in Cabinet Minister Judd Buchanan's office became available, Eloise applied and spent the next 1½ years with Buchanan, who was then Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Science and Technology.

With little room for advancement in Buchanan's office and feeling the need for a change, Eloise left the "Hill" and became assistant campaign director for the United Way in Ottawa-Carleton.

"This was a refreshing change for me," she says, "and a lot of fun. It gave me a lot of experience working with volunteers."

With two United Way campaigns behind her by 1980 and the federal Liberals' return to power, Eloise concluded that she hadn't gotten politics out of her blood.

Stressing her knowledge of Parliament Hill and Kitchener, she approached freshman Kitchener MP Peter Lang and became his administrative assistant. So avid was her interest in politics, that while she worked with Lang, Eloise spent her vacation working on John Turner's leadership campaign in 1984!

But the only thing certain about political fortunes is uncertainty, and following the Tory landslide in 1984, Eloise was without a job. "After being in Ottawa for 10 years, there was not a lot left for someone with my background. So I took some time off and returned to where my roots are - southern Ontario."

The siren call of political involvement was once again heard by Eloise when a provincial election was called in late spring of 1985. "I've always felt that politics suited the sorts of skills I had, and I've always enjoyed the activity and excitement." With her extensive political and administrative experience, she was promptly hired by the Premier as he began to assemble his staff.

She is quick to caution that she has no interest in running for office. "I like to be behind the scenes," she says, "I'm fascinated with the political process."

In spite of her love of political life and the

ensuing demands, Eloise has always maintained a circle of friends outside politics "so that I don't lose my objectivity. I really make an effort to keep in touch with friends, especially some I knew from St. Jerome's - Heather (née Jack) Halls of Cobourg, Sharon and Ken Forgeron of St. Catharines, and Will and Celia (née O'Brien) Beelen of Nepean."

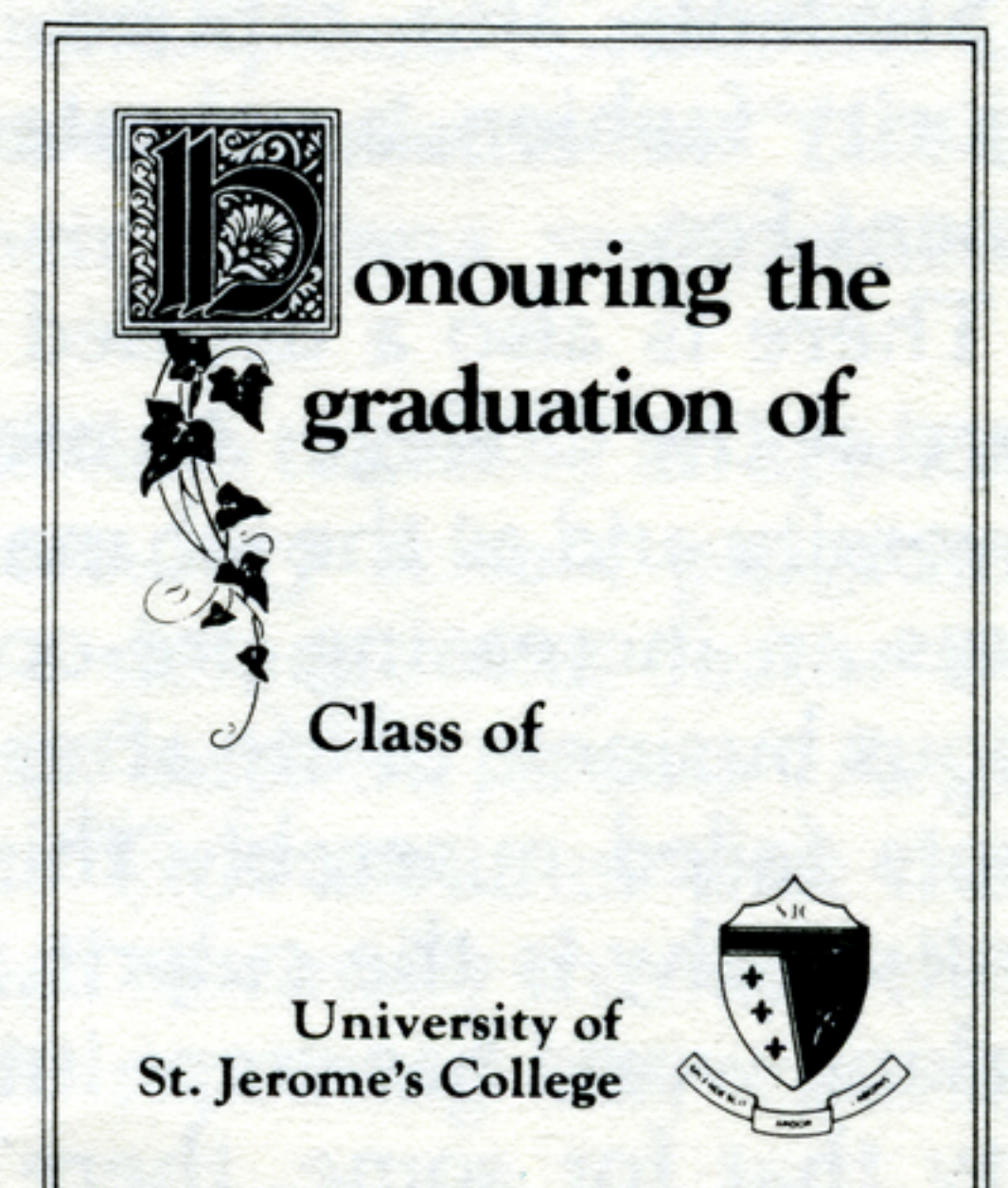
Away from Queen's Park she enjoys music and plays the piano. Eloise and her brother have a cottage in Perth and she loves to spend time there savouring the outdoors.

Taking part in the January Career Forum '87 for students sponsored by the College's Graduates' Association, Eloise says, "I felt I had come home. Being at the College brought back some really nice memories of friends, classes and life in Notre Dame Residence. I always enjoyed St. Jerome's and found the profs excellent. I think I took that period of my life for granted because the spirit, friends and closeness of those years set the stage for me in later years in terms of interacting with people.

And for Eloise, politics is the art of working with people, sharing ideas and being organized.

Of course, life in a minority government is unpredictable and exciting. As this article was being written, the provincial Liberals were perched atop the opinion polls at 50% and with an election imminent. Wearing an attractive red sweater, Eloise offered no predictions on the date of the next election, but we have little doubt as to the outcome she'd like to see.

### News briefs



**Bookplate offer** Once again, parents of the graduating class will have an opportunity to honour their son's or daughter's convocation by having a bookplate inscribed with their name and grad year. For a donation of \$25, which is used for our scholarship fund, one bookplate will be placed in a book in the College's Library. It is a fitting way to commemorate this special occasion and build our scholarship fund for future students at the same time.

"Fun on Ice" was the name given to the SJC Grads' Association Hamilton chapter event held on Saturday, April 5 at the North Wentworth Community Centre in Hamilton. A sparse but appreciative crowd left the warmth of their homes to battle near-torrential rains to play broomball and have a family skate with other St. Jerome's grads. Thanks to Peter, John and Mike Curtis who organized the event.