



USRA Newsletter
September 2025
No. 125



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From Our Co-Presidents

We hope you are all well and have had an enjoyable summer. Please find below highlights of our USRA activities in the past months.

The USRA is most grateful to President Peter Stoicheff and Kathryn Warden for reinstating the **President's Reception for New Retirees**, held this year on May 20 at Marquis Hall. Thanks to President Stoicheff who congratulated the new retirees, Marnie Wright, Sheila Arneson and colleagues in Human



Resources for planning, Marnie and Provost Vince Bruni-Bossio for introducing each of retirees, and Alaisha and Sheila for the congratulatory cards and chocolates. Jim presented on the many activities and benefits of the USRA and answered questions on what we do for retirees.



June is always a special and busy month on campus and USRA Board members were honoured to represent our Association as part of Chancellor Grit McCreath's platform party at **Convocation Ceremonies** (June 2-6). It was indeed a wonderful occasion when Chancellor Emerita Vera Pezer—an USRA Board member—was bestowed an Honorary Doctorate on June 5. Please see more on page 13.



First: Merry Beazely, Sheila Arneson, Alaisha Gaudet, Jim Thornhill, and Jackie Huck at event on May 20.

Second: Guests at Marquis Hall.

Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet

On June 18, hundreds of members of the USask community, including USRA members, gathered to [celebrate the conclusion](#) of the largest campaign in Saskatchewan's history. With the support of thousands of donors, friends and alumni from around the world, \$570,739,155 was raised to support the people, projects and places at USask through the **Be What the World Needs** campaign. Earlier that day, Merry and Jim attended the **2025 Retirement Information Session** for faculty thinking of retiring in the next few years. We related the mandate and activities of the USRA and encouraged faculty to join us upon retirement.

USRA Board members were happy to represent retirees at the annual **USask Employee Appreciation Picnic** on June 24. We had an

excellent spot in a new location in the Engineering Building gardens and next to the Human Resources and Pensions booths. Thank you to Jackie for organizing our participation again this year and Alaisha for providing USRA visors and USRA magnets for the many employees who stopped by.



First: Alaisha Gaudet, Merry Beazely and Jackie Huck.

Second: Bob Card and Tom Wilson.

Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet

June 24 was a busy day, as we hosted a wonderful **USRA Members and Awards Celebration** at Louis' Loft. It was a time to celebrate our members and our activities during the past year, and to honour nine distinguished USask retirees with USRA Awards. Please see more on page 9.

The **Education, Social and Recreation Committee** continues to provide an excellent array of lunch seminars. Please see page 5 for the full list of Fall noon-hour seminars, to be held monthly at the WDM.

We need to say a word to those of you who continue to appreciate using your **USask e-mail** and related benefits. There are some changes coming, likely a nominal fee, but for now the University Relations office has assured us it is business as usual. Should you need ICT support about your account, you can:

- **Call** [306-966-2222](tel:306-966-2222) or [1-800-966-4817](tel:1-800-966-4817) toll-free within Canada to leave a voice mail. A service ticket that can be addressed quickly will be created for you.
- **In Person** if in Saskatoon, stop by the IT Support Desk on the [First Floor of the Murray Library](#) where there are support specialists available to assist you face-to-face.
- **E-mail** itsupport@usask.ca

USRA is pleased to collaborate with the **Saskatoon Council on Aging (SCOA)** through our involvement with the annual **Globe Walk Challenge**. And although we can't participate this year, please take in **Spotlight on Seniors**, to be held on Tuesday, October 7, 2025, at TCU Place. This annual event, hosted by SCOA and TCU, covers topics from hobbies and investments to careers, vacations, education, and retirement. Good fun and food as well!

The **USRA Annual General Meeting** will be held on Wednesday, October 15, 2025, following our October luncheon, and hear more Saskatoon history by the very interesting and entertaining City Archivist Jeff O'Brien. Please plan to attend. The draft agenda is attached. Our committees look forward to reporting to you on all our activities. We hope you can make it and please bring your comments and questions.

We extend **sincere thanks** to all Board members for their dedicated work, individual USRA members who continue to provide support to the Board and the many senior leaders on campus, who generously facilitate our activities.

Should you have ideas, questions or are interested in joining the Board, we would love to hear from you. **Please contact** USRA by phone, mail, or e-mail, or contact Merry at merry.beazely@usask.ca or Jim at jim.thornhill@usask.ca directly with any ideas and questions you have.

Cordially yours,

Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill



Guests attending event on June 24.

Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet



Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet

Education, Social and Recreation Committee Report

2025-2026 Upcoming Activities

Presentations will be held at the Western Development Museum (WDM) unless otherwise noted. Doors open at 11:30 a.m. and lunch is served at noon with a guest speaker presentation to follow. E-mail invitations will be sent to members about two weeks before each event with information about the speakers, lunch menu and cost.

We hope you will join us for the following events:

- Wednesday, September 24** Evert van Olst, Secretary of the Saskatoon Blues Society, will speak on the history of the Society and play some blues for your enjoyment.
- Wednesday, October 15** Jeff O'Brien, City Archivist, will present "Saskatoon in the Atomic Age, 1945-60".
Please note that this presentation precedes the Annual General Meeting that starts at 2:00 p.m.
- Monday, November 17** Dr. Elizabeth Scott, Curator, WDM, will present on the history of the WDM in Saskatoon and across Saskatchewan. A short tour will follow the presentation.
- Thursday, December 11** Annual President's Holiday Reception from 3:30-5:30 p.m. at the President's Residence.

Monthly presentations for January 21, February 18, April 15, and May 20, 2026, at the WDM will be determined over the next month.

- Wednesday, March 18** Doral Johnson, USask Pension Office Manager, will present on pension factors to be aware of as retirees.

The Committee welcomes your suggestions of future speakers of interest to you, contact us by phone at 306-966-6618 or by e-mail at ss.usra@usask.ca.

Health Column: Aging and Muscle Loss

By Dr. Tom Wilson, Professor Emerit, USask College of Medicine



This photo of seniors doing push-ups appeared in the StarPhoenix on February 4th, 2025¹ as part of a feature story by fitness columnist Jill Barker on exercises to prevent “sarcopenia.” Derived from two Greek words: *sarx* (flesh) and *penia* (paucity), sarcopenia is loosely defined as progressive muscle and strength loss. It is associated with falls, frailty, disability and death²—all events we would rather avoid.

Aging is the main risk factor for sarcopenia: after age 40, our muscle mass declines 8% each decade, then accelerates to 15% per decade at age 70. Other risk factors include sedentary lifestyle, malnutrition, hormone changes, diabetes, alcohol abuse, and smoking. About 12% of Europeans over 65 have sarcopenia². I presume Canada has about the same.

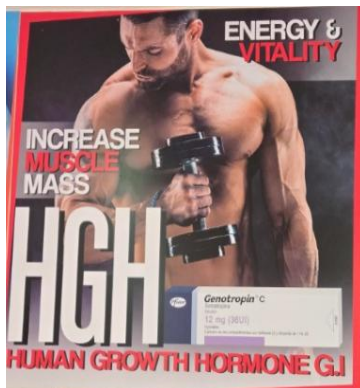
Diagnosing sarcopenia is somewhat akin to diagnosing obesity; we know it when we see it. But when does “pleasantly plump” turn into obesity? Two factors when measured together are very sensitive for the diagnosis of sarcopenia: structure and function. For structure, the arrow points to the shoulder deltoid muscle. If the deltoid is not wasting, it will have an outward convexity.



A good test of function is the “Timed Up and Go” (TUG)³ test. Measure three meters from a chair that has arms. Sit in the chair and time yourself to stand, walk to the three-meter line, return, then sit in the chair. Under 10 seconds is a “pass.” If you have both a convex deltoid and a less than 10-second TUG result, you don’t have sarcopenia. If only one or neither, read on.

Exercise and nutrition are recommended to prevent sarcopenia. A recent meta-analysis reviewed seven controlled trials of exercise⁴. After three to 18 months, muscle strength improved in five trials, but muscle mass increased in only three. Importantly, another systematic review found no increase of serious adverse effects from exercise in 773 studies⁵.

While adequate protein intake (1.2 gm/kg of body weight) is recommended by experts to improve muscle mass, in these trials protein and amino acid (e.g. leucine) supplements showed no evidence of benefit⁴.



Given my interest in drugs, I photographed this poster in a Mexican pharmacy and wondered about the efficacy and safety of human growth hormone (HGH). Would I look like this fellow if I took HGH? HGH is secreted by the pituitary, a small gland attached to the brain. HGH levels are low during childhood, rise dramatically with puberty, and decline as we age⁶. This has prompted trials to replace HGH in the elderly to prevent muscle and strength loss.

Several studies have shown modest increases in muscle size (5%) with HGH use but no increased muscle strength⁷. Adverse effects include insulin resistance, diabetes, and cancer. Moreover, mice whose growth hormone levels are reduced by various means live twice as long as “normal” mice⁸!

A few drugs approved for testing in humans are in clinical trials. Unfortunately, to date, none of them has demonstrated significant increases in muscle function. Back to exercise and diet for now.

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Spotlight on USask History: USask's VIDO Joins Global Efforts to Prepare for the Next Pandemic

By Kathryn Warden

Building on a half century of life-saving animal and human infectious disease research, University of Saskatchewan's VIDO (Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization) is in the vanguard of international efforts to prepare the world for the next pandemic.

Working on an innovative human vaccine, VIDO is helping to advance the international "100 Days Mission", a goal embraced by Canada and other G7 and G20 nations—and spearheaded by the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI)—to make available new vaccines in as little as 100 days after a virus with pandemic potential is identified.

"Based on our experience with the last pandemic, Canada needs to have the capacity to make its own vaccines," said VIDO director Dr. Volker Gerdt. "As one of the most versatile facilities in the world for making a wide variety of vaccines for humans and animals, including new vaccine platforms, VIDO can play a key role in building this capacity."

With leading-edge R & D facilities to take vaccine development to the next level, strong local, national, and international support, and impressive research talent from around the world, VIDO is becoming known as Canada's Centre for Pandemic Research.

In 2020, VIDO was the first research group in Canada to isolate the SARS-CoV-2 virus, the virus behind the COVID-19 pandemic, and the first university in the country to launch clinical trials for a COVID vaccine candidate. Building on this work, VIDO has pivoted to developing a "platform vaccine" as part of CEPI's portfolio of broadly protective coronavirus vaccines.

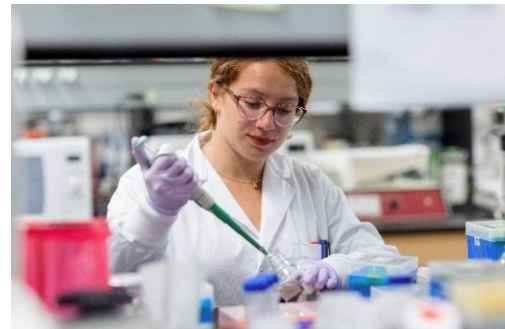
Most coronaviruses affect animals such as pigs and bats, but seven coronaviruses—including SARS and COVID-19—have spread to humans.

Instead of the current "one bug, one drug" approach to tackling coronavirus threats, VIDO's latest promising vaccine innovation is to develop a single vaccine with broad coronavirus protection that can target COVID-19, SARS, and other coronaviruses that have not yet crossed into the human population.

This fall, VIDO plans to do a manufacturing run of the first prototype of this coronavirus platform vaccine. Once scaled up and tested for quality control, the vaccine will be ready for clinical trials in people and become part of CEPI's vaccine "library" to address future pandemics.

CEPI is providing \$24 million to manufacture the vaccine and complete the Phase 1 clinical trial. How did VIDO, which turns 50 this fall, evolve from a small but innovative organization focused on livestock diseases (with eight commercial animal vaccines, six of which are "world firsts") to a world-class research institute focused on emerging diseases that pose global pandemic threats for animals and humans?

Part of the story is that an estimated two-thirds of all human pathogens originate in animals and with its longstanding excellence in addressing livestock diseases affecting cattle, pigs, and poultry (with a 20:1 return on investment to industry and the country), VIDO has been able to transfer this expertise to emerging human pandemic threats as well.



Graduate student prepares samples in VIDO lab

Photo credit: VIDO/USask

For instance, tuberculosis (TB) crosses between cows and humans, with potential for devastating impacts for both human and bovine health. VIDO is working on a bovine TB vaccine critical for TB-free trade in the beef industry. Avian flu is another example of a highly pathogenic zoonotic virus. VIDO has done critical research on avian flu in dairy cattle that has helped paved the way for a vaccine to protect the dairy industry.

Canada's participation in the 100 Days Mission requires improved capability to scale up vaccine development—and VIDO is well equipped to do that.

Through PrairiesCan, Innovation Saskatchewan, and the City of Saskatoon, more than \$100 million has been provided to complete major infrastructure that includes a new animal housing facility and upgrades to enable research in containment Level 4, the highest level of containment. The new animal facility will enable VIDO to safely house species needed for modern vaccine research—from ticks, to bats, to bison. “Normally, you don’t have one facility that has all these capabilities,” said Gerdts. “We will be able to make a discovery in the lab, show proof of concept in animal models, and then immediately start in-house manufacturing of that prototype for clinical testing. This saves a lot of time which is of the essence during pandemics.”

With these new facilities expected to become operational in 2027—combined with VIDO's new vaccine manufacturing facility which is slated to soon produce its first prototype human vaccine—VIDO is on track to become a world-class hub for research, innovation, and vaccine manufacturing.

“With support from all levels of government and our donors, we have created one of the most unique facilities in the world,” said Dr. Gerdts, noting that VIDO continues to develop much-needed new veterinary vaccines that can then be licensed to companies

“We can make animal and human vaccines in the same facility. With these critical facilities, we will soon be able to respond to any pathogen, whether or animal or human. Working with global partners, we will make vaccines today for tomorrow's pathogens.”

VIDO's updated vaccine design involves a safe and stable technology that works by presenting non-infectious protein fragments to the body to generate an immune response.

As well, using AI and quantum computing, VIDO anticipates being able to predict what the next vaccines need to look like. “The aim is to never again be in the situation where we are in rush to address a pandemic,” Gerdts said.

Recent Books by USRA Authors: History of Hemophilia Care in Canada

By Dr. Robert (Bob) Card, USRA board member

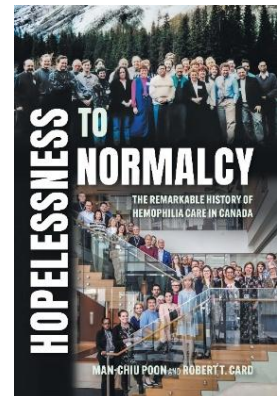
Hopelessness to Normalcy: The Remarkable History of Hemophilia Care in Canada is a recently published book that traces the remarkable evolution of hemophilia care in Canada. My co-author Dr. Man-Chiu Poon (Emeritus Professor, University of Calgary) and I are retired hematologists (both members of our respective university retirees groups) and we each have more than five decades of experience in hemophilia care. Our book begins with the initial description of the hereditary bleeding disorder, which became known as hemophilia, in the second century AD. The book subsequently concentrates on the evolution of hemophilia and other bleeding disorder programs in Canada which began in the 1950s and continue to flourish to the present day.

Our methodology included: (1) review of literature and archived material; (2) 80 interviews of doctors, other health care professionals (e.g. nurses), and patients; and (3) personal experiences of the authors over the

years. The book was formally launched this year at the national hemophilia meetings in Winnipeg in May and the Canadian Society for the History of Medicine in Toronto in June.

The remarkable portion of the history relates to what USask historian Erika Dyck has called a “roller coaster” effect given the swings over the years in patient prognosis between hopelessness and normalcy, as well as to the resilience of both the medical and lay groups in continuing to work together following what has been described as an unspeakable patient tragedy.

Prior to the 1950s, the prognosis for a person with hemophilia was indeed *hopeless*. In William Osler’s first edition of *Principles and Practice in Medicine* 1892, he pointed out that fewer than 50% of hemophiliacs would reach their teen years. Crippling joint damage with severe pain was universal. Despite advances in diagnosis and blood transfusion during the first half of the 20th century, this prognosis was basically unchanged until the early 1950s.



Beginning at that time, the development of plasma therapy and various concentrated forms of replacement factor (much of which could be given at home), plus the development of dedicated multidisciplinary hemophilia clinics, led to a progressive improvement in prognosis. By the spring of 1982, at a major national hemophilia meeting held in Saskatoon, the speakers and patients alike realized that *normalcy* had been achieved with expected life span near normal.

However, this was abruptly interrupted by the unexpected tragedy of the “tainted blood era” due to unsafe blood products. The first cases in hemophiliacs were reported in early-summer 1982 and this rapidly had a devastating effect on persons with hemophilia. Within the next several years, the majority of severe hemophiliacs across Canada were infected with HIV/AIDS and passed away. Most were boys and young men. This situation, dramatized from the patient point of view in the CBC series *Unspeakable*, became *hopeless* again. Our book is presented from the point of view of health care professionals.

During the late 1980s and through subsequent years, advances were made in therapeutics to remove the risk of blood-borne infections from products used by persons with hemophilia. The multidisciplinary hemophilia programs were strengthened in 1994 by the development of the Association of Hemophilia Clinic Directors of Canada (AHCDC) which celebrated its 30th anniversary last year. Newer therapies such as gene therapy continue to be developed so that *normalcy* has been achieved again, with expected life span back to normal.

While the overall story is Canadian, there are many Saskatchewan ties. Indeed, in 1970, Dr. Brian McSheffrey, a full-time member of USask pediatrics department at the time, developed at Saskatoon’s University Hospital one of the first dedicated hemophilia clinics outside of Montreal. Subsequently, Caryl Bell, RN, became one of the first dedicated-funded hemophilia nurses in Canada. Caryl was the spouse of the late Dr. Dick Bell, USask kinesiology professor. There are interview quotes from one Saskatchewan person with hemophilia, born in 1952 and deceased (unrelated to hemophilia) this year, whose life story spanned the entire “roller coaster” era of hopelessness to normalcy, and back again!

These stories and much more can be found in our book published by FriesenPress. Further information about the book and where it is available can be found on the website: www.hopelesnesstonormalcy.ca.

USRA Members and Awards Celebration

By Merry Beazely, Chair, Awards Committee

Our annual Awards Celebration was held on June 24, 2025, at Louis’ Loft. It was so good to be together to commend all our members and this year’s USRA initiatives, and to honour our USRA 2025 award recipients.

Jim Thornhill, USRA Co-President, presided and acknowledged the indigenous land on which we are celebrating. It was wonderful to have Cheryl Hamelin, Vice-President University Relations, with us to bring greetings from the university. Jim welcomed the award nominators who presented the following awards.

ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan - “LET’S FLY UP TOGETHER” AWARD

Recognizes meaningful and significant contributions of a USask individual retiree, or a pair or group that includes one or more USask retiree, Indigenous or non-Indigenous, towards achieving the commitments of the Indigenous strategy for the University. We were honoured to recognize two Individuals with this award.



Cheryl Hamelin

Photo credit: David Mandeville

Awardee: Elder Roland Duquette

A ceremonial elder from Mistawasis Nêhiyawak First Nation, Elder Duquette is a member of the “Wise Ones Circle,” the group of highly respected elders who gifted to USask the ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan Let’s Fly Up Together Indigenous Strategy in 2020. Roland embodies the principles and commitments of the USask Indigenous strategy, particularly with respect to promoting reconciliation and mutual respect, and strengthening pathways of success for Indigenous youth. He works with USask units, promoting understanding of the history and culture of Indigenous Peoples. Roland holds the revered position of Eagle Staff Bearer for USask convocation ceremonies and leads the Grand Entry procession. He has provided opening prayers and remarks at a wide variety of conferences and events. It is an honour to recognize Elder Duquette!

Nominated and presented by Kathryn Warden.



Elder Duquette with nominator Kathryn Warden, along with co-presidents Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: David Mandeville

Awardee: Dr. Ernie Walker

Ernie is an outstanding researcher and teacher and was instrumental in establishing Wanuskewin Heritage Park (WHP). It was years ago, when he worked for Mike Vitkowski, a rancher whose family owned the WHP land, that Ernie began finding ancient artifacts and treasures left by Great Plains First Nations communities who gathered there centuries ago. He worked with First Nations communities to preserve these treasures. Ernie went on to lobby Saskatoon City Council to save this precious land and spearheaded a massive fundraising campaign that led to establishment of a heritage park and interpretive centre in 1992. He is working diligently to put WHP on the map as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Thank you, Ernie, for bringing us Wanuskewin, from the Cree language “seeking peace of mind.”

Nominated by the USRA Board and presented by David Mandeville.



Dr. Ernie Walker (second from right) and nominator David Mandeville, along with co-presidents Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet

CONTINUING CONTRIBUTION AWARD

Recognizes persons who have retired from the University, and have continued to make research, scholarly, artistic or service contributions, whether scholarly, artistic or service at an exceptional level, for the benefit of society. The USRA was pleased to recognize two deserving individuals.

Awardee: Dr. Michael Atkinson

Professor Emeritus Michael Atkinson has had a long and prolific academic career. Right before his retirement, he started a new SSHRC-funded project, in collaboration with Dr. Haizhen Mou. Their findings are published in *Fiscal Choices: Canada After the Pandemic*, recently shortlisted for the 2024-25 Donner Prize for the best book on public policy by a Canadian. Michael continues to contribute to the academic community as a sought-after mentor, providing workshops and generous advice to students, faculty, deans and leaders of universities across Canada. Michael's dedication and impact to the community of USask, both before and after his retirement, is unmatched. Thank you, Michael!

Nominated and presented by Dr. Haizhen Mou and Amber McCuaig.



Dr. Atkinson (centre) with nominators Dr. Haizhen Mou and Amber McCuaig, along with co-presidents Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: David Mandeville

Awardee: Ross Wilson

Ross retired in 2006 following a long career of high school and University sportsmanship, leadership and service, notably in the fields of basketball and soccer and especially in the promotion of female athletes. Ross's leadership and vision continue to be instrumental in preserving the legacy of Huskie Athletics and enhancing the organizational structure of university sports in Canada. His efforts have fostered a sense of community, connection and celebration among former athletes, and strengthened the bonds within the athletic community. Throughout his various roles, Ross has consistently demonstrated dedication to excellence. His contributions have significantly enhanced the quality and integrity of sports at our university and beyond. Thank you and congratulations Ross!

Nominated by Shannon Chinn and Nicole Orr and presented by Coach Steven Kook.



Ross Wilson (second from left) with presenter Coach Steve Kook, along with co-presidents Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: David Mandeville

HONORARY LIFE AWARD

Recognizes USRA members who have made a significant contribution over a long period to the USRA and the University community. Three Honorary Life Award recipients were recognized this year, as nominated by the USRA Board.

Awardee: Mary Dykes

Mary was invaluable providing guidance, as USRA welcomed former University of Saskatchewan Non-Academic Retirees Association members to our Association in 2017. On the USRA Board, she brought expertise, wisdom and a wonderful holistic perspective to USRA portfolios as chair and member of many committees and initiatives. Close to Mary's heart, was her leadership in establishing the *ohpahotân | oohpaahotaan – "Let's Fly Up Together" Award*. During the COVID epidemic, Mary skillfully managed our virtual Board meetings, educational sessions, and AGMs. Thank you, Mary for your many contributions!

Nominated by the USRA Board and presented by Jacqueline Huck.



Mary Dykes (second from right) with nominator Jacqueline Huck, along with co-presidents Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: David Mandeville

Awardee: Dr. Bryan Harvey

Bryan's tremendous accomplishments to agriculture in Canada and beyond have been widely applauded. His contributions to the USRA have also been exceptional—as President, Vice-President, Chair, and member of committees. Bryan has served as President, Vice-President and on many committees of the national association of retiree associations, CURAC, serving as our long-time representative and most ably chaired two national conferences at USask.

Éminence grise is the phrase that Tom Wilson, our current Treasurer, uses to describe Bryan and translates to 'loyal confidant and respected authority – an Elder Statesman.' Congratulations and thank you Bryan!

Nominated by the USRA Board and presented by Jim Thornhill.



Dr. Bryan Harvey

Photo credit: University of Saskatchewan

Awardee: Eileen Harvey

Eileen completed her career at USask as committed Executive Assistant to President Peter McKinnon. She has been an active member of the USRA executive and faithful attendee and participant at USRA events. As Chair of the Awards Committee, Eileen was instrumental in developing the definitions and processes that we use today for our awards and has produced excellent Awards programs and related documents over the years. She served on the Organizing Committee for USRA's first national conference of retiree associations, and for our most recent hosting, generated the extensive Conference program. Thank you, Eileen!

Nominated by the USRA Board and presented by Merry Beazely.



Eileen Harvey

Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet

Bryan and Eileen have recently moved to Ottawa and we will miss them! They were celebrated as well at a special event in February 2025.

PRIME OF LIFE ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Honours and expresses appreciation of persons who have retired from work at the University and, after their retirement, have been recognized for outstanding scholarly, artistic or service contributions, recognized by international, national, provincial or local bodies.

Awardee: Dr. Bruce E. Coulman

Professor Emeritus of Agriculture and Bioresources, Bruce's prestigious academic career and his remarkable contributions to the sustainability and growth of Saskatchewan and Canadian agriculture have been recognized. He was recently inducted into the Saskatchewan Agricultural Hall of Fame, whose mission is 'to salute the agricultural leaders in Saskatchewan.' Last November, Bruce was formally inducted into the Canadian Agricultural Hall of Fame in honor and celebration of his outstanding contributions to the agriculture and food industry. Congratulations and best wishes to Bruce.

Nominated by Dr. Bryan Harvey and presented by Tom Wilson.



Dr. Bruce Coulman with nominator Dr. Tom Wilson, along with co-presidents Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: David Mandeville

DUFF SPAFFORD AWARD FOR EXCEPTIONAL SERVICE

Recognizes a USask retiree based on total contribution made to the university community over the period of the retiree's association with the University, including any contributions made during student years by a candidate who is an alumnus.

Awardee: Dr. Ernie Olfert

It was with great sadness that Dr. Olfert's family shared news of his sudden passing in March 2025. A member of the first graduating class of the Western College of Veterinary Medicine, Ernie embarked on a 40-year career at USask, where he showed passion and commitment to his work as a veterinarian, teacher, educator, researcher and author. Ernie served as Director of the Animal Resources Centre and University Veterinarian, and his work was invaluable in establishing and ensuring humane treatment of lab animals, including his extensive contributions to the Canadian Council on Animal Care. The USRA was honoured to recognize Ernie and so pleased that Ernie's partner Diane accepted the award on his behalf and that Shirley Spafford—wife of Duff Spafford after whom this award is named—could be with us.

Nominated by the USRA Board and presented by Dr. Tom Wilson.



Left: Dr. Ernie Olfert

Photo credit: The Olfert Family

Right: Diane Olfert and Shirley Spafford with Dr. Tom Wilson and Jim Thornhill

Photo credit: David Mandeville

Thanks are extended to Awards committee colleagues Kathryn Warden, Vera Pezer, David Mandeville, Bryan Harvey, and Jim Thornhill. Special thanks to Jackie Huck, USRA Secretary, for preparing the award certificates and maintaining the award displays in our Retirees Lounge on campus, and to Alaisha Gaudet, .40 FTE Stakeholder Engagement Coordinator for the USRA, for all her assistance. Many thanks to the award nominators and presenters.

Oh, and we must not forget the unique West Coast centerpieces, crafted by Jim, and flowers by Merry, that lucky attendees took home with them. It was an important and very enjoyable event.



Shirley Blackburn with Jim Thornhill's West Coast art.

Photo credit: Alaisha Gaudet

University Honorary Degree to Chancellor Emerita Vera Pezer

By Dr. Thomas Wilson, Chair, Honorary Degrees Committee

Dr. Vera Pezer, PhD, received USask's highest honor, an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree (LL.D.), on June 5, 2025. It recognized both her scholarly achievements and her service to the University. It strikes me that she could have received a Doctor of Science, as a pioneer in sports psychology, and a Doctor of Letters as an author of four books.

Born the eldest of four children of a middle-class family in rural Saskatchewan, she enrolled in the College of Arts and Science in the late 1950s. She stated in her address to graduates at convocation that she learned many lessons for which she did not receive grades: avoiding plagiarism, collaborating with fellow students, and time management—all of which served her well in her distinguished career. She went on to earn a master's degree in psychology and a PhD in sports psychology. She accepted an appointment as a faculty



Dr. Vera Pezer, Chancellor Grit McCreath and President Peter Stoicheff

Photo credit: Dave Stobbe for University of Saskatchewan

member in the Department of Psychology, then became Assistant Dean and Director of Student Counselling. From 1991 to 2001, she served as Associate Vice-President Student Affairs. Her Chancellor's portrait in the Peter MacKinnon Building depicts her surrounded by students emphasizing the esteem in which she was held.

Vera's athletic prowess and her voluntary service to organizations outside the university are legendary. We are very proud that she has accepted nomination as president of our association.

We are also proud that she joins a long list of Honorary Degree recipients recommended to the Senate by USRA.

HELP WANTED USRA Honorary Degrees Committee

The USRA Honorary Degrees Committee solicits suggestions from the membership for recipients of Honorary Doctor of Science, Laws, Civil Laws or Letters. We forward our suggestions to the University Secretary and the Senate Honorary Degrees Committee. We are taken seriously as evidenced by our successful nominees: Ali Rajput, David Carpenter, Joy Kogawa, That Ngo, Wilf Keller, Bryan Harvey, and the illustrious Vera Pezer!

For information on the nomination process, see:

<https://secretariat.usask.ca/documents/senate/GuidelinesForHonoraryDegrees.pdf>. Please send your suggestions to Tom Wilson thomas.wilson@usask.ca.

College and University Retiree Associations of Canada (CURAC/ARUCC) News (See [CURAC](#))

USRA members are all members of CURAC, a federation of retiree organizations at colleges and universities across Canada. Its objectives are to: coordinate activities that promote communication among member associations, share information about activities of member organizations, and speak on issues of concern to over 24,000 university retirees across Canada.

USRA is represented on CURAC by: CURAC Representative – Bryan Harvey; CURAC Conference Committee – Merry Beazely; CURAC Health Policy Committee – Tom Wilson; and CURAC Later Life Learning Committee – Beryl Radcliffe.

CURAC highlights:

- *CURAC News!* recently relaunched to share stories with retiree colleagues and peers
- Western University's [Western Retiree Chapter](#) welcomed to the CURAC family
- McGill University hosted an excellent conference in May, 2025 (see [Conference | McGill University Retiree Association - McGill University](#)) that included CURAC's AGM attended virtually by Merry
- The CURAC Conference Committee is working with colleagues in B.C. RAs to hold the 2026 conference there; we'll keep you posted
- Additional benefits for retiree association members recently negotiated, with thanks to Ron Champion, CURAC Benefits Committee chair (please see below).

Benefits for USRA members, as members of CURAC (see [Member Benefits — CURAC](#)). Our association benefits financially by our members' participation in some of these programs, as CURAC returns a portion of rebates that it receives to its member associations.

- **Hearing Care services from HearingLife** – includes 10% off price of hearing aids
- **Eyecare from Specsavers** – 60% discount on lens upgrades and other benefits
- **Car and Home Insurance from Belairdirect** – special deals and tools to manage your insurance
- **Travel Insurance from Belairdirect (formerly Johnson)** – exclusive rates and travel perks, with no age or health restrictions
- **Extended Health Benefit and Travel Insurance from RTO/ERO** – to purchase new extended health insurance, transfer to a new plan, or add to existing insurance. Rates not age-banded.
- **Guided Travel from Collette** – professionally planned itineraries and services of a Tour Manager. Bookings can be made by individuals, with family and friends, as well as groups. CURAC members save \$100 per person on all tours plus seasonal offers.

USask retirees Susan Whiting and Alan Deschner took a Collette trip to Peru (Lima, Machu Pichu and Sacred Valley) and Ecuador (Galapagos and Quito) in May 2025 and had a wonderful time. It was a small group tour (13 people) managed by a Collette guide who stayed with the group the whole time, and who handled all transportation and bookings. In every stop in Peru and in Ecuador, there was an additional guide specific to that country/region who covered all information on the attractions visited.



Photo credit: Collette

HELP WANTED

Intensely Vigorous USask Retirees 2026 Globe Walk Team

WANTED: A willing volunteer to act as co-captain (with Lea Pennock) for next year's USRA Globe Walk team. The co-captains are responsible for sending out occasional e-mails between January and April, to remind participants to keep track of their activity each month, and then compiling the results on a monthly basis and sending them in to the Globe Walk organizers. Everything's done by e-mail, so you don't need to be in Saskatoon to volunteer. If you're interested in helping out, contact Lea at lea.pennock@usask.ca. The captains will put out the call for team members for our 2026 Globe Walk season in the next newsletter.

USask Senate Representative Report

By David Mandeville

Under the provisions of *The University of Saskatchewan Act 1995*, the university has three governing bodies: the Board of Governors, Council, and the Senate.

The *Board of Governors* is responsible for overseeing and directing all matters respecting the management, administration, and control of the university's property, revenues, and financial affairs.

University Council oversees and directs the university's academic affairs.

The *Senate* is the university's window on the province and the province's window on the university. The senate's responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- appointing the Chancellor
- confirming decisions of Council related to admission requirements and quotas

- recommending to the Board or Council any matters of things that the senate considers necessary to promote the interests of the university
- the granting of honorary degrees
- non-academic student discipline.

The involvement of the USRA came about after a casual conversation with a senator at Spring convocation 2022. After discussions among the members of the USRA Board, a nomination form was submitted on November 11, 2023. The Senate approved our application at the April 20, 2024 meeting.

Senate meetings are held twice a year, in October and April.

The Saturday meeting is preceded by a reception on Friday evening to introduce new members to the group. For the first two meetings that I have attended, this has been an opportunity to showcase some of the latest research initiatives by holding the gathering in the Agriculture Building and Innovation Place.

The morning of the Saturday session is taken up with reports from various university officials, appointment of the Chancellor in the spring of 2025, granting of honorary degrees, and other such matters that fall under the senate's responsibilities.

After lunch, the group usually breaks off into table discussions to brainstorm issues around the university's involvement with the general community of the province, how we can meet the needs of the province, and how we can possibly involve the non-academic population, businesses and organizations that surround us.

Although I've been associated with the university for over 50 years, being a member of Senate has given me quite a different view of the university and its workings.

Thanks to Merry Beazely for supplying background information.

Full details of the governance structure of the university can be found on the USask website under "[Governance](#)."

Members No Longer with Us

The USRA has learned of the deaths of the following members and extends our sympathies to their families.

Note: Surviving partners of deceased Life Members may inherit their partner's USRA membership if they wish to do so. Please contact USRA via e-mail at ss.usra@usask.ca or phone 306-966-6618 for further information.

Donald Gordon Bates (March 20, 1930-April 25, 2024)

USRA life member Donald Bates earned a commerce degree from the University of Saskatchewan. He was then employed by Elwood Flynn in the menswear business for many years. In the early 1970s, he became the manager of the USask Bookstore.

Peter G. Bietenholz (January 7, 1933-December, 2023)

USRA life member Peter Bietenholz earned a PhD from Basel, Switzerland in 1958, and joined the USask history department in 1963, serving as department head from 1974 to 1977. He was awarded an earned Doctor of Letters degree in 1996 in recognition of the excellence of his scholarly work on Renaissance humanism generally and on Erasmus specifically. He retired as Professor Emeritus in 2000, having authored seven books and edited nine. Peter had such an impact on the university that his colleagues began to refer to the year 2000 as PB or "post-Bietenholz".

Before moving to Vancouver in 2009, Peter and his wife Doris, a teacher and author, donated an historically significant collection of rare books to the USask Library. The collection, which includes 16th and 17th century editions of works by authors such as Erasmus and Machiavelli, reflects the importance of printing in the Renaissance period. For additional information on the Peter Bietenholz Rare Book Collection, please visit [University Archives and Special Collections](#).

William Yu-Fang Chen (May 11, 1927-July 23, 2025)

Born in China, USRA Life member William Chen immigrated to Canada and earned a degree in library science from the University of Toronto. He moved to Winnipeg and then to Saskatoon to take a position as a cataloguer with the University of Saskatchewan Library. He became a Canadian citizen in 1969 and was a founding member of the Mandarin language school in Saskatoon. He was interested in current affairs, travelling, swimming, and cycling. He also wrote essays, and self-published seven books.

U. Theodore (Ted) Hammer (March 25, 1924-July 20, 2025)

USRA Life Member Ted Hammer graduated from USask in 1950 with a Bachelor of Education degree, and then switched fields, earning a master's in biology in Montana and a PhD from USask in 1963. As a USask biology professor, he focussed his research broadly on investigating blue-green algae and pollution in Prairie lakes. In the 1960s, his work in the Qu'Appelle River Basin was one of the first demonstrations that excessive phosphorous concentrations and associated toxic blue-green algae blooms were caused by runoff from fertilized farm fields and feedlots.

This contributed to industry awareness of the problem and to industry changes locally and internationally. In the 1970s, he conducted a major study on how acid rain, caused by emissions from the Alberta oil industry, was affecting Saskatchewan lakes. This work drew widespread interest and led to remedial responses. In 1969-70, he spent a sabbatical year at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, where he worked on saline lakes. This research led to an ongoing focus on saline lakes, culminating in his book *Saline Lake Ecosystems of the World* (1986).

Ted served as head of USask's biology department (1973-76) and became Director of the Rawson Academy of Aquatic Sciences (1986-92). He was a member of many societies and committees including: the International Biological Program Committee on Freshwater, the National Research Council (1968-73), the Saskatchewan Environmental Advisory Council (1977-81), and the International Society of Limnology.

Ted cared deeply about his students and was an outstanding educator. His kind and supportive leadership made him a role model and appreciated mentor for his students who often stayed in touch over the years. Ted retired from the university in 1991 but continued in an Emeritus capacity until 1998 to serve on graduate student committees and assist with their research.

Ted and his wife Marie attended many USRA monthly dinners/talks until they moved to Edmonton in 2022 to be closer to their daughter, Debra.

Ernest Daniel Olfert (August 7, 1943-March 19, 2025)

Ernie moved from McMahon, SK to Saskatoon to study at the USask Western College of Veterinary Medicine (WCVm) and received his DVM degree in 1969 in the first WCVm graduating class. Following graduation, he moved to Calgary to work in private practice for a year where he met his wife, Diane. The couple moved to Saskatoon where Ernie had a 40-year career at the WCVm, exhibiting passion and commitment to his work as a veterinarian, teacher, educator, researcher, and author. He was known for his work in promoting humane treatment of lab animals, developing guide publications and online training courses for lab animal users worldwide.

A USRA life member, Ernie was posthumously awarded the USRA Duff Spafford Award for Exceptional Service on June 24, 2025.

Dorothy Ostlund (February 15, 1930-July 12, 2025)

USRA life member Dorothy Ostlund was a modern, forward-thinking woman, interested in learning new things and always knowledgeable about current events. In 1949, she married Earl who worked for 31 years in the USask crop sciences department. Their marriage lasted over 70 years until Earl died in 2020. Dorothy's obituary states: "If you wish to honor her, be kind or helpful to someone; make them feel special. She would love that."

Margaret Vilma Swan (November 22, 1930-April 3, 2025)

After graduating from Kipling High School and Normal School in Moose Jaw, Margaret began a 10-year career as a school teacher and worked in several Saskatchewan schools. She earned a B.Ed. with Distinction from USask. In 1954, she married Michael Swan and moved to Saskatoon in 1957 where Michael taught Greek, Latin and ancient history at USask for 40 years and retired as Emeritus Professor of history. Margaret was an enthusiastic fundraiser and donor for the Saskatoon Junior Symphony and the Saskatoon Symphony Orchestra, and all three of their children became professional musicians.

Marilyn Elizabeth Underhill (October 24, 1933-March 19, 2025)

Marilyn graduated from USask with a BA (sciences) in 1954, and she and pharmacy student Ted Underhill were married later that summer. Marilyn worked as a laboratory technician at the University Hospital in Saskatoon. In 1956, Ted was awarded his master's degree at USask and the family moved to Rhode Island so that Ted could pursue a PhD in pharmacology. In 1962, the family moved back to Saskatoon where Ted taught in the pharmacy department for a year before joining the National Research Council's Plant Biotechnology Institute where he had a distinguished career recognized with a USask Doctor of Science in 1990. In the mid 1970s, Marilyn taught labs in the USask microbiology and immunology department where she received the affectionate nickname TOL (tough old lady) from her students in recognition of her profound inner strength. In 1991, Marilyn and Ted retired and moved to Victoria. In 2019, they moved to Edmonton to be closer to family support, and following Ted's death, Marilyn moved to Calgary in 2021.

Note: For notices in memory of former employees of the university, as well as current students, employees and others honoured when the flag on the Thorvaldson Building is flown at half mast, please see the In Memoriam website maintained by the University Secretary: <https://governance.usask.ca/about/flag-at-half-mast.php#InMemoriam>.

Keep in Touch!

We welcome your letters to the editors Jackie Huck, Bob Card, Joe Angel, and Kathryn Warden. Do you have an event of interest to retirees and seniors you want to let other members know about? We are happy to pass on news about your event by e-mail and in the newsletter. Please send the information by e-mail.



Moving? Changing your email address?

Don't miss an issue of our newsletter and our e-mail notices about upcoming activities!
Make sure you send us your new contact information.

University of Saskatchewan Retirees Association

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Phone: 306-966-6618

E-mail: ss.usra@usask.ca

Website: <https://usra.usask.ca>

**UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN RETIREES ASSOCIATION
ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
Wednesday, October 15, 2025
Western Development Museum, Saskatchewan Hall
Approximately 2:00 P.M. after Lunch and Speaker Presentation by Jeff O'Brien**

DRAFT Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Approval of the Agenda
3. Approval of Minutes of October 16, 2024
4. Co-President's Report: Merry Beazely and Jim Thornhill
5. Treasurer's Report: Tom Wilson
6. Standing Committee Reports
 - a. Awards: Merry Beazely
 - b. College and University Retiree Associations of Canada (CURAC): Bryan Harvey and Merry Beazely
 - c. Communication Committee: Jacqueline Huck
 - d. Education, Social and Recreation Committee: Jim Thornhill
 - e. Membership Committee and Tribute to Members No Longer with Us: Beryl Radcliffe
 - f. Engagement Committee: Jim Thornhill
 - g. Honorary Degrees: Tom Wilson
 - h. Ad Hoc Committee on Campus Heritage: Merry Beazely
 - i. Ad Hoc Committee on USRA Documents: Merry Beazely
 - j. USask Senate Representative: David Mandeville
7. New Business
 - a. USRA Involvement with USask Leaders and Activities
 - b. Benefits Update
 - c. Framework for USask/USRA Promotion of Retirees' Books and Awards
 - d. Need for USRA Strategic Plan
8. Report of the Nominations Committee: Jim Thornhill
9. Election of Board for 2025-2026
 - a. President: Vera Pezer
 - b. Vice-President: Hope Bilinski
 - c. Secretary: Jacqueline Huck
 - d. Treasurer: Tom Wilson
 - e. Past President: Merry Beazely
 - f. Members at Large: Joe Angel, Bob Card, Bryan Harvey, David Mandeville, Nigel Rawson, and Kathryn Warden
10. Other Business
11. Adjournment

Report of the Nominations Committee for 2024-2025

Members: Jim Thornhill (Chair), Merry Beazely, Kathryn Warden, and Tom Wilson

The Nominations Committee is pleased to present to the membership the following list of officers for executive positions and the directors for the 2025–2026 year, all for one-year terms.

Election Slate:

President: Vera Pezer

Vice-President: Hope Bilinski

Secretary: Jacqueline Huck

Treasurer: Tom Wilson

Immediate Past President: Merry Beazely

Directors: Joe Angel, Bob Card, Bryan Harvey, David Mandeville, Nigel Rawson, and Kathryn Warden

We are most appreciative that Vera Pezer has agreed to take on the presidential duties this year. We are also very appreciative that Tom Wilson and Jacqueline Huck have again agreed to continue in their very important roles as Treasurer and Secretary, respectively. Merry Beazely, Bryan Harvey, Kathryn Warden, Bob Card, and David Mandeville are continuing on the board to share their time and talents with us in the upcoming year. Jim Thornhill and Beryl Radcliffe are stepping away from the USRA board and we thank them for their time and efforts in growing the USRA mandate.

We are delighted to relate to the membership that two new board members will be joining us for the upcoming year.

The first new board member is Hope Bilinski, who is a registered nurse with over 40 years of combined experience in rural clinical practice, education, research, and leadership. Hope has had vast experience and interest in advancing nursing education, program accreditation, interprofessional health education, and rural health. She is also a strong advocate for patient/family-centred care. She has played a leadership role in the College of Nursing as Associate Dean Academic in advancing the nursing curriculum and provincial access to nursing education. We are delighted that Hope has agreed to take on the position of Vice-President for the year ahead.

Our second new board member is Dr. Nigel Rawson, independent researcher, who is a pharmacoepidemiologist and pharmaceutical policy researcher and currently a senior fellow with both the McDonald – Laurier and Fraser Institutes in Canada. Dr. Rawson was educated in the UK and has an MSc in statistics and a PhD in pharmacoepidemiology. Dr. Rawson has performed epidemiologic studies concerning prescription drug safety and other pharmaceutical policy issues for over 40 years. He has published over 150 peer reviewed articles, book chapters and media opinion articles on pharmaceutical policy issues in this country and beyond. He has held academic positions in both the UK and Canada (Memorial University, and from 1990-1998 at the University of Saskatchewan with cross appointments in the Colleges of Medicine, and Pharmacy and Nutrition). Since 2012 he has continued as an independent researcher with a mission to create data-driven results to pharmaceutical policy issues.

Note that the election of new board members at the AGM will be by acclamation unless further nominations, each signed by three members of the association, are received by the secretary at least 15 days prior to the meeting on October 15. Please see USRA's By-Laws (Section 10) on the USRA website.

If you have any questions or are interested in serving with us on the board in the future, please contact Jim Thornhill at jim.thornhill@usask.ca.

Respectfully submitted,

Jim Thornhill, Chair, on behalf of the Nominations Committee