

Aurora's McNeill to be inducted into Order of Canada

Aurora resident Irene Y. McNeill will be inducted into the Order of Canada this year as a member.

The long-time sailing advocate was among 80 Canadians announced to the Order by Governor General Mary Simon last week as part of the Order's traditional New Year's Honours list.

"The Order of Canada fosters a sense of pride and cohesion in our country," said the Governor General in a statement. "Every appointment celebrates not only the talent, expertise, and dedication of individuals, but also the countless lives they have touched through their work, vision and contributions.

"Their commitment extends beyond borders, inspiring progress in our communities, our country, and around the world. I offer my heartfelt congratulations to each new appointee on this well-deserved recognition."

McNeill has been recognized for her contribution to the sports community.

"Irene McNeill has helped develop the sport of sailing in Canada and beyond," reads her citation. "She is frequently invited to officiate at grassroots and elite competitions, and is the first Canadian woman to earn the designation of International Race Officer. She also co-founded the LEAP program to encourage girls' participation in the sport."

Other notable Canadians included on the Honours List are Rosalie Abella, the first Jewish woman to serve on Canada's Supreme Court, and children's songwriter and entertainer Raffi.

This year's recipients will receive their honours at ceremonies hosted by the Governor General throughout the year ahead.

Following the announcement of McNeill's appointment, the Etobicoke Yacht Club shared their excitement at the news.

"A member of EYC since 1988, Irene is a sailor, racer, mentor, and trailblazer," they said. "She is Canada's first and only female International Race Officer (IRO)—a high-pressure, high-profile role that demands exceptional leadership, judgment, and resilience. At a time when the sport was overwhelmingly male-dominated, Irene persevered, led with confidence, and helped redefine what leadership on the water looks like.

"Beyond officiating at grassroots and elite international events, Irene has been a powerful advocate for inclusion in sailing. She co-founded LEAP-Sailing, a program dedicated to encouraging girls' participation in the sport, and continues to mentor women into race management and leadership roles.

"Her Order of Canada is not only well deserved, but a reminder of the lasting impact one passionate, determined sailor can have. Fair winds, Irene, and thank you for everything you've given to EYC and beyond."

By Brock Weir
Editor/Local Journalism Initiative Reporter