

**Nomination of Mary Lou Whitehorne  
FRASC 2015  
by Roy Bishop and James Hesser**

**Preamble**

The following summary was prepared a year ago by Roy Bishop, David Chapman, James Edgar, and David Lane when they nominated Mary Lou Whitehorne for the Service Award. There is no need to alter significantly that earlier summary. Mary Lou's contributions and commitment to The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, both administratively and in terms of education and public outreach, are outstanding. The Society was particularly fortunate to have her as its president during the years 2010-2012 when changes to its governance structure were required by revisions to federal law. The resulting in-depth review and ensuing revision of RASC governance guidelines addressed complex issues arising from structures and processes accumulated over many decades that were no longer acceptable practices under the new law. Her passionate leadership, quick intelligence, and sheer hard work on behalf of the RASC in those years were invaluable. The RASC has had few women Presidents. Mary Lou is in the same league as two of those whom we knew personally: Helen Hogg and Mary Grey, who were both nationally recognized for the excellence and impact of their contributions.

The award of Fellow of the RASC (FRASC) was created to acknowledge the work of long-serving members who have made extraordinary contributions to the Society, much of which service has been rendered at the national level. For the numerous, diverse, outstanding contributions summarized in this nomination, we recommend her appointment as Fellow of the RASC.

## **Summary of Mary Lou Whitehorne's contributions**

Mary Lou Whitehorne has had, for more than 25 years, a major positive impact on The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, both at the Halifax Centre level and at the National level.

As a Medical Laboratory Technologist and mother of two young girls, Mary Lou once read in an astronomy column by Terence Dickinson that one could see the Galilean moons of Jupiter with a pair of binoculars. She looked, and became hooked on astronomy!

She joined the Halifax Centre in 1985 and has since become a Life Member. Her sparkling personality and growing interest in the heavens inevitably led her into many executive positions within the Centre over a 14-year period, including as Councillor, Secretary, Observing Chair, and three years as Centre President (1990, 1991 and 2002), plus chair of the committee that hosted the 1993 RASC General Assembly in Halifax. Over the years, she has also given numerous presentations to the Centre on a wide variety of astronomical topics.

Mary Lou advanced her knowledge of astronomy with courses at Saint Mary's University. Her observations of Be stars with the telescope at the Burke-Gaffney Observatory resulted in two papers in the *RASC Journal*, and the Chant Medal.

As a mother and amateur astronomer, Mary Lou became keenly interested in science education. Among her many endeavours in that regard, including being chair of the national Education Committee from 2004-2006, she, with other Centre members, established the Nova Scotia Planetarium Advisory Committee (which later became the Atlantic Space Sciences Foundation). She led this organization for several years, while it developed and ran a successful *Starlab* mobile planetarium program in Nova Scotia. The planetarium was later donated to Halifax's Discovery Centre,

resulting in a legacy of astronomy being added to their continuing programs.

She has been continuously active in public outreach activities in the name of the RASC, with many other organizations. These include the Girl Guides of Canada, the Nova Scotia Museum of Natural History, Halifax's Discovery Centre, the Halifax Planetarium, and the Nova Scotia Department of Education.

A highlight of her work in promoting formal astronomy education is her book *Skyways, Astronomy Handbook for Teachers*. First published in 2003 by the RASC, the book is now in its second edition, with both English and French versions. She also authored the new *Moon Gazers' Guide* and edited the sixth edition of *The Beginner's Observing Guide* after the death of its author Leo Enright. Over many years, she was also a contributor to the *Observer's Handbook* and the *Observer's Calendar*.

Mary Lou's major national service began in 2006, when she offered to run as a candidate for the position of RASC 2nd Vice-President. Upon her election, she began an 8-year sequence of service to the national Society as 2nd Vice-President, 1st Vice-President, President (2010-2012), and most recently Past President and Chair of the Awards Committee.

A rare moment in Mary Lou's life occurred during those years. At the 2007 General Assembly in Calgary, she was rendered speechless by the announcement that asteroid 144907 had been named "Whitehorne" in her honour.

Mary Lou was our 1st Vice-President during 2009, the International Year of Astronomy, when the RASC partnered with CASCA and the FAAQ to coordinate activities and produce several bilingual outreach publications. In addition to being the inspiration for the *Mary Lou's New Telescope* children's book,

Mary Lou continued the legacy of IYA by joining the Beyond IYA Committee, which continued the outreach partnership between the three organizations.

The years Mary Lou has spent in the presidential and vice-presidential positions were unusually busy ones for the Society, and at times turbulent. She took the executive lead to respond quickly to the Canada Revenue Agency crisis in 2008, when the Society had to seek the guidance and advice of corporate counsel. Mary Lou acted as the Society's liaison and spearheaded meetings between the Executive, National Council, and the lawyer.

Among other issues facing the Society during those years were government-legislated changes in the governance structure of the Society; changes in staffing at the Society Office; and the transition of the national office from its own building (with landlord responsibilities) into rental accommodations. These issues and others demanded much of Mary Lou's time and talents. The successful outcomes were in no small way the result of her initiative, good judgment, and tenacity.

One of Mary Lou's lasting legacies is the creation of the professional Executive Director position. Mary Lou had a vision that the RASC needed such a person to move the Society forward. Working in concert with the Executive Director and others, Mary Lou was also instrumental in creating the first Strategic Plan the Society has seen in many years.

Mary Lou Whitehorne has constructively and effectively brought unique perspective, analysis, determination and leadership to the betterment of all aspects of The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada.

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