

RN S MARK THE PASSING OF
a true
leader

BY KIMBERLEY KEARSEY



"I will miss her warmth, honesty and trusted advice. She brought joy to everyone around her."
Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario

Joan Lesmond (second from left) served as RNAO President from 2004–2006.

"It's my promise to the nurses of Ontario, and to the clients we all serve, that I will be a messenger for the marginalized."

Joan Lesmond, 2004



This summer, RNAO members were shocked by the sudden death of Past-President Joan Lesmond, who was diagnosed with stomach cancer in the spring. As president (2004–2006), Lesmond helped to launch the association's *Embracing Diversity Project*, which led to RNAO's first-ever statement on diversity. She was there – in person – when the federal government established the country's first *Health Accord* in 2004. She hosted the association's annual general meeting one year after a SARS outbreak prompted its cancellation for the first time in RNAO's history.

In the words of those who knew her...

"I am numbed, sad and mad. A beautiful person, colleague and friend has been taken away from us. Joan's zest for life and contributions will stay with us forever."
Doris Grinspun, Executive Director, RNAO

"I know that the legacy she leaves will endure."
Barb Mildon, President-Elect, Canadian Nurses Association

"Joan accomplished so much in her nursing career and was an inspiration and mentor to so many of us."
Carol Timmings, Director, Chronic Disease Prevention, Toronto Public Health

"Joan was an amazing human being, full of energy and wisdom. Her leadership and social justice influence was remarkable."
Carolyn Davies, former RNAO board member

"Wherever we see kindness in the world, we can be assured that we are also catching a glimpse of Joan's spirit and her warm smile."
Scott Wolfe, Federal Coordinator, Canadian Alliance of Community Health Centre Associations

"I was always so proud of her dynamic presence and leadership."
Jocelyn Hezekiah, former RNAO president (1979-1981)

Former Health Minister George Smitherman (right) receives a Nursing Week tour of Casey House from Lesmond and fellow staff.



"Given her natural leadership qualities, as president, Joan always knew how to steer us in the right direction. Personally, I feel privileged to have been on the board with Joan. She certainly taught me a lot."
Jocelyne Maxwell, President, Association of Ontario Health Centres

"We couldn't be more pleased that before she passed away she graciously accepted our request to honour her. We wanted to dedicate the *IEN of the Year Award* to her memory so the nursing community can celebrate and remember one of its most outstanding leaders."
Zubeida Ramji, Executive Director, CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses

"Joan was truly one of our shining stars. One of my proudest moments involves accepting the *YWCA Women of Distinction Award* on Joan's behalf earlier this year. Joan brought passion, energy and commitment to all of her endeavours."
Shirlee Sharkey, President and CEO, St. Elizabeth Health Care

"Joan's ... support and dedicated effort in knocking down barriers has opened doors for many internationally educated nurses."
Amy Go, Board Chair, CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses

Lesmond spends time with nursing students at a leadership luncheon in April 2011.

"What I recall most is Joan's effervescence. She had the ability to light up a room."
Marion Zych, Director of Communications, RNAO

"I will always remember the last time I saw Joan, at the RNAO student leadership lunch... where she shared her passion for nursing. I left the lunch with a warm hug from her. Thank you Joan for your love and compassion for diversity."
Poonam Sharma, Immediate Past-President, Nursing Students of Ontario Interest Group (2010/2011)



During her tenure, nurses celebrated many milestones, including news that: a baccalaureate would become compulsory for nurses to practise in Ontario; mandatory retirement at 65 would be abolished; family health teams would become a part of the government's commitment to primary health-care reform; and LHINS would begin providing health services closer to home. She also led RNAO when members passed "Resolution #1," a difficult resolution that explored RNAO's relationship with the Canadian Nurses Association.

Lesmond immigrated to Canada in 1970. She earned a BScN from Ryerson University and a master's degree in community health nursing and doctorate in education – health policy from D'Youville College. She worked in community health care for more than three decades, most recently as Executive Director of Community Engagement at Saint Elizabeth Health Care (SEHC) and Executive Director of the SEHC Foundation. She was former chief nursing executive and director of professional practice at Toronto's Casey House Hospice, worked with Women's Health in Women's Hands

Community Health Clinic, was a director of Women's College Hospital, chair of the Ontario Caregiver Coalition, president of the Association of Ontario Health Centres, president of Regent Park Community Health Centre, chair and director of the Hospice Association of Ontario, and on the board for CARE Centre for Internationally Educated Nurses.

In 2011, Lesmond received a *YWCA Woman of Distinction Award* for health leadership. In 2010, she was recognized with a *St. Lucian Governor-General Homecoming Award*. **RN**