

President's Report 2023—2024

I am pleased to present the President's Report for Seniors College, covering the fiscal year from July 2023 to June 2024. This report includes updates from our five standing committees, highlighting their activities, achievements, and contributions throughout the year.

We are fortunate to have a dedicated team of 16 talented individuals on our Seniors College Board of Directors. As a working board, each member actively participates in one or two of our Standing Committees. Our Board members bring a wealth of professional experience and valuable community involvement, enriching the work we do. To support their engagement, we held an orientation session to familiarize everyone with our by-laws, policies, practices, committee structure, and ongoing initiatives.

Central to all the Board's efforts is the invaluable work of our part-time Coordinator, Tory Kennedy, who skillfully manages the College's programs and coordinates its policies. Her primary responsibilities span organization, program development, and administration, ensuring the smooth operation and growth of Seniors College.

This year has been exceptionally busy, with various programs offered across the fall, winter, and spring sessions. We undertook numerous marketing and communication activities, addressed decreasing membership concerns, and secured new sponsorships. Despite facing financial constraints from declining memberships and rising costs, we pursued outreach initiatives, enhanced our website amidst unexpected news from our provider, and began developing a new strategic plan to guide us forward.

Last year, our 376 members were the backbone of Seniors College, and without their support, our programs wouldn't be possible. Our members come from Prince, Queens, and Kings counties, with most attending classes in Queens. We hired two individuals to promote Seniors College in Kings and Prince counties to boost engagement. However, competition from other similar type organizations, limited course, and fewer available facilitators in these rural areas make it challenging to offer a wide range of programs that attract and retain members. We continue to encourage all adults over 50 to join and experience the benefits of lifelong learning with us.

Members were invited to join us for the Annual Members Meeting on November 18th at the Stratford Emergency Services Centre. Additionally, we hosted a Christmas Social on December 2 at the Jack Blanchard Centre, where over seventy members gathered to enjoy food and fellowship, celebrating the season together.

Our members' support over the past 25 years has made Seniors College a model admired by many. In 2023, we celebrated this milestone anniversary. To honor the occasion, our Patron, The Lieutenant Governor of Prince Edward Island, Antoinette Perry, hosted a Government Tea at Fanningbank. We invited many of the founding directors, and during the event, we highlighted the history, accomplishments, and growth of Seniors College—from just 80 members and three courses to over 370 members and more than 140 courses today.

Outreach has been a key priority this year. Our coordinator and committee members have collaborated closely with the coordinators and executives of Tantramar Seniors College, enabling us to share online courses in 2024. This partnership offers a wonderful opportunity for our members and theirs to enjoy expanded learning from home. Additional outreach activities included attending events such as the Robertson Library expansion announcement, the induction of our Board member and former Senator Diane Griffin as Chancellor of UPEI, the Rotary Club of Charlottetown Peace Pole Ceremony, the Community Foundations 2023 Granting & Awards Recognition Ceremony, and the Seniors Secretariat's Senior Islander of the Year Award reception.

This year, Donald Moses, the liaison between UPEI and Seniors College, and I worked with the University of Prince Edward Island to formalize a five-year Memorandum of Understanding, strengthening our partnership and commitment to shared goals.

GMD Consulting was engaged in developing a new strategic plan for Seniors College. A planning workshop was held on October 21, with Board members and some selected members participating. The resulting Strategic Plan outlines our mission, vision, goals, key focus areas, and future opportunities.

As President of Seniors College, I had the privilege of nominating Board member Steve Connolly for the Rotary Club of Charlottetown Royalty Mentor Award, a prestigious honor his father, Stephen P. Connolly, received in 1991. With four letters of support and extensive background information on Steve's career and community contributions—including his mentoring work with me in securing sponsors for Seniors College and his guidance of youth and community

members—we submitted the application in May, well ahead of the October deadline. We are thrilled to share that Steve has won this distinguished award and was honored at the Mentor Dinner on November 13.

In partnership with the PEI Seniors Citizens' Federation, we applied on April 3, 2024, for a grant from the Seniors Secretariat to create and deliver six 45-minute exercise videos for seniors as a promotional tool. While we had hoped to launch in May, we received approval on August 24 and a generous \$4,000 grant for our "Empowering Seniors through Exercise Videos" project. We are grateful for this funding opportunity and recognize the dedication and effort required by our volunteer Board members to bring such a project to life.

Our Committees work year-round to ensure a dynamic lineup of offerings. I will speak to some of their highlights:

Program Committee/ Coordinator:

The Program Committee, chaired by Judy Rose, includes dedicated members Valerie Robinson, Sandy Anderson, Helen Bernstein, Ruth Thorne, David Cairns, and our Coordinator, Tory Kennedy. Their commitment to developing a diverse and engaging curriculum has been instrumental in maintaining and growing our vibrant learning community.

Our part-time Provincial Coordinator, Tory Kennedy, plays an essential role in ensuring our program runs smoothly. Tory is responsible for scheduling classes, coordinating facilitators and venues, and everyday communication with our members - all of which are crucial for a seamless experience each term. As Tory often says, "Every day brings a different challenge, but knowing there is tremendous support from the Committee and the Board, no challenge is too big." Her ability to adapt and handle the unexpected is key to keeping Seniors College organized and running efficiently.

In September 2023, we welcomed over 350 members who registered for Seniors College courses across our fall, winter, and spring semesters. With a robust selection of approximately 140 course offerings, our program continues to cater to a variety of interests, skill levels, and formats. While most of our courses were held in person to facilitate social interaction and hands-on learning, a significant portion was also delivered remotely. This flexibility allows members facing geographical or mobility constraints to participate fully. In addition, our expanding library of pre-recorded courses, accessible on the Seniors College website, provides an invaluable resource, allowing members to pursue learning at their own pace and time.

The Program Committee strives to balance course offerings yearly with a mix of familiar favorites and fresh options. This year, the Committee is pleased to announce that 25% of the courses are new additions, reflecting their commitment to innovation and responsiveness to member interests. Listening closely to what members are asking for and monitoring trends in course attendance, the Committee has focused on bringing in fresh ideas that inspire and engage. In particular, the Committee dedicated significant time this past year to expanding course selections and membership in Prince and Kings Counties, resulting in a remarkable 50% increase in class offerings for Kings County alone.

As mentioned earlier, we also introduced a successful pilot project in collaboration with Tantramar Seniors College. Through this initiative, we currently offer five classes, with 73 of our members participating this fall. While a tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes effort went into establishing this partnership, the benefits to our members are invaluable. This collaborative approach broadens our course offerings and builds connections with neighboring colleges that share our mission for senior education.

In addition, we have successfully established structured processes for gathering member feedback through both randomly selected course feedback surveys and an all-member interests and preferences survey. These evaluations have been instrumental in shaping our program, guiding decisions on course offerings and

formats, and ensuring that we remain aligned with our members' evolving needs and interests. Based on these insights, we have introduced many new and relevant topics, including our popular AI course and plans for additional technology, fitness, and hobby-based classes.

The Program Committee remains highly engaged and dedicated to enhancing the Seniors College experience, with a strong focus on expanding course diversity. Members have shared positive feedback on the quality and variety of our curriculum, underscoring our efforts to create a dynamic, accessible, and enriching environment for lifelong learning. Our continued commitment to listening and responding to members' interests is at the heart of our programming success.

Website Technology

The Website Technology Committee, chaired by Mary MacPherson and including Kate Gordon, Ruth Thorne, and Tory Kennedy, had a busy year in 2023-2024 with ongoing website and system updates. The committee and other Board members conducted thorough user testing to ensure improvements met member needs.

Facilitators utilized the newly implemented Enhanced Course Entry feature to directly add their 2023-2024 courses to the Content Management System. This online process encouraged facilitators to update their course information independently, eliminating the Seniors College Coordinator's previous copy/paste work.

Although membership numbers were lower than anticipated, the September 2023 registration for the 2023-2024 courses proceeded smoothly, with no website issues.

In fall 2023, we added a new "Our Sponsors" page and an enhanced "Our History" page to the website, providing additional background on the beginnings of Seniors College. We also included a banner celebrating 25 years of Seniors College.

Seniors College received approval for a Community Services Recovery Fund grant to support significant updates to our Course Registration System and Content Management System. The project was scheduled for completion in December 2023.

In late October 2023, our website provider, WSA Solutions, informed Seniors 0College that they would be changing their business model and would no longer support our website once current software projects were completed. In response, an Ad Hoc Committee was formed to evaluate and recommend future system options and support. A full report from the Ad Hoc Committee follows later in this document.

A major portion of the Community Services Recovery project was completed in January 2024, including the addition of a venue file to the Content Management System and new financial reports tracking venue costs and facilitator honoraria. Additionally, member course registration pages were updated in the Course Registration System with new icons and venue details.

System security updates identified by WSA Solutions in February 2023 and scheduled for fall took longer than anticipated to complete, finally being released in May 2024. This release included updates to vulnerable areas of the system software and enhanced password encryption for both members and facilitators.

The final phase of the Community Services Recovery project was completed in June 2024, adding features for tracking dormant and inactive member accounts as well as enhanced course reporting capabilities.

Ad hoc committee report:

In the fall of 2023 our website provider, WSA Solutions, informed us that their business model was changing and they would no longer support our custom-built website. The President, Vice President and Tech Committee chair met with our contact at WSA in December and they agreed that WSA would continue to host the website, provide fixes if necessary and continue the social media campaign, but would not do any new development work on the site once they finished the project then underway to enhance our data and financial management.

The Board created an Ad Hoc committee, consisting of Mary MacPherson, Tech Committee chair, Kate Gordon, Vice President, Donald Moses, David Cairns, both Directors, and Alkarim Sachedina, member at large. to review the options for the website/content management system.

The committee met to discuss options and recommended that we move to configurable systems for a website and content management system, rather than trying to port our existing system to a different provider. The committee also developed a requirements document, investigated options used by other seniors'

colleges (in BC, Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia) and by UPEI, drafted a Request for Proposals, and identified three possible providers in Charlottetown.

The final recommendation, however, was to pause the project due to concerns over declining membership totals and the ability of the Board to undertake a project of this magnitude at the current moment. We felt that market research was necessary to identify causes for the decline in membership and that possible remedies would affect the design and planned use of the website so that it would be premature to send an RFP out. Further, while the provider could provide project management/technical expertise, there will need to be someone on the Board with the background to act as liaison – understanding the College's needs and able to direct the provider.

Many thanks to the members of the committee and to Judy Rose and Tory Kennedy for their assistance. All the documents prepared by the committee have been delivered to the Secretary for future use.

Thank you to the Website Technology Committee and the Ad Hoc committee for your assistance and support this past year.

Marketing/Communications Committee

The Marketing and Communications Committee, chaired by Shirley Pierce, included Steve Connolly, Mary McPherson, Judy Rose, Peter Benson, Helen Bernstein, and David Cairns.

Over the past year, the Marketing and Communications Committee focused on three main goals: securing new sponsorships for financial stability, increasing awareness of Seniors College, and maintaining open communication with members and prospective members.

To achieve financial support, the committee actively pursued sponsors, establishing three sponsorship levels: Gold (\$10,000), Silver (\$5,000), and Bronze (\$2,500). Each sponsor receives publicity on our website, Facebook page, and in *The Guardian*, along with opportunities to collaborate on senior-focused courses. By June 2023, Lawton's Drugs joined as a Bronze sponsor, and we welcomed four additional sponsors: Rotary Club of Charlottetown (Gold), St. Dunstan's University

Board of Governors (Silver), and Provincial Credit Union and Cox & Palmer (Bronze). We are grateful for their support and look forward to continued partnerships.

Recognizing that Seniors College remains less known among many seniors, we made a concerted effort to increase our visibility across the Island. Presentations were given at the Charlottetown Library Learning Centre, National Association of Federal Retirees (Charlottetown Branch), UPEI Retirees (via Zoom), the Catholic Women's League, and the PEI Women's Institute annual meetings. We also reached out to various organizations, including Stratford Town Hall, City of Charlottetown, PEI Council on the Status of Women, the Haviland Club, PEI Seniors Federation, PEI Military Resources Centre, the Real Estate Association, and Holland College Retirees (ASCOR), many of which now feature our updates in their newsletters. Additionally, we distributed posters to libraries and over forty PEI Seniors Federation clubs and created bookmarks for distribution at the Christmas Tea and other events.

We leveraged free publicity through *The Guardian*, which kindly featured sponsor photos and published articles by Gary MacDougall promoting Seniors College and highlighting members' experiences. CBC radio and CBC Compass also provided valuable interview and promotion time with Matt Rainie and Jay Scotland. During Seniors Month, we placed ads in the *Eastern Graphic* and *Western Graphic* and featured a course photo in *Faces of the Island*, a supplement by Rotary Club of Charlottetown Royalty.

Our online marketing included regular emails to members, website news posts, and Facebook updates highlighting important events such as the 25th Anniversary Tea, Annual Art Show, and new sponsor announcements. We shared content with groups like "We Love Prince Edward Island" and "PEI Good News Only." Ahead of fall registration, we also launched two targeted Facebook ads for residents and over, increasing outreach within our target demographic

Finance Committee

For the fifth year, we engaged Arsenault Best Cameron Ellis (ABCE) to compile our financial statements in “Notice to Reader” engagement. They have completed the work for the year ending June 30, 2024 and recommended one adjustment. The Treasurer will give more details on our finances in his report. A letter was sent to the Canada Revenue Agency to enquire about the rules that govern Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) remittances, but we haven’t had a response yet.

Organizational Development Committee

The Organizational Development Committee, chaired by Maureen Sinnott and including Betty-Lynn Burdett, Peter Benson, Diane Griffin, and Shirley Pierce, made significant strides this year. The Strategic Planning process, initiated in June 2023, concluded in late fall with the development and adoption of the 2024-2029 Strategic Plan. The College partnered with GMD Consulting to lead the process and create a comprehensive five-year plan.

Implementation of the Strategic Plan has begun, with recommendations and identified opportunities assigned to the appropriate committees for action. Each area will review, report, and act on these recommendations throughout the five year term, with progress monitored and reported over time.

The committee also assessed the need for additional policies in specific areas, including privacy, information collection, and document retention. Policy development is underway to ensure best practices are followed regarding how materials are held and managed.

Concluding Comments

As highlighted throughout this report, Seniors College Board members and our Coordinator, Tory Kennedy, work year-round to provide a diverse array of

engaging courses across Kings, Queens, and Prince counties each fall, winter, and spring for our valued members.

While membership numbers have decreased since COVID impacted our learning community, and we continue to face various challenges, we remain committed to ensuring Seniors College is a successful and rewarding experience. We are deeply grateful to our wonderful facilitators and members who work together to keep Seniors College vibrant and engaging.

This year, we bid a fond farewell to three Board members—Kate Gordon, Diane Griffin, and David Cairns—who have contributed a cumulative nine years of service to Seniors College. Their dedication has left a lasting impact, and they will be greatly missed.

I warmly welcome our new Board members who will be introduced shortly and look forward to working together to continue building a thriving, social, and fun learning Seniors College community for all.