

Liên H i Ng i Vi t Canada



Vietnamese Canadian Federation
Fédération vietnamienne du Canada

249 Rochester Street Ottawa, ON; K1R 7M9 CANADA
Tel.: (613) 230-8282; Fax: (613) 230-8281; Email: vietfederation@bellnet.ca
Website: www.vietfederation.ca

PRESS RELEASE

Marion Dewar: the greatest friend of the Vietnamese community in Canada

It was with great sadness that we learned of the sudden death of former Ottawa Mayor Marion Dewar.

To the Vietnamese community in Canada, Marion was a saviour, a great friend, and a constant source of moral inspiration.

In the late 70's, hundreds of thousands of South Vietnamese fled the Communist regime which was imposed on South Vietnam after it was taken over by North Vietnamese Communist troops on April 30, 1975. Many of them escaped in small, leaky boats in the treacherous South China Sea. Thousands died of starvation, drowning, or were raped, killed by brutal pirates. Yet when their boats reached the shores of neighbouring countries, they were not allowed to disembark. Worse still, some of the refugee boats were pushed out to the sea.

Witnessing the despair of the Vietnamese boat people played out in the news media almost everyday, in May 1979, as Mayor of Ottawa, Marion gathered a group of community and church leaders in her office to map out a plan to rescue them. Thus *Project 4000* was born. Thousands of citizens of Ottawa from all walks of life enthusiastically responded by forming hundreds of sponsor groups to welcome the refugees to the city. This grass-root movement, together with the initiatives undertaken in other cities, such as the *Operation Lifeline* spearheaded by Professor Howard Adelman in Toronto, and the strong urging of then Secretary of State Flora MacDonald, prompted the Government of Canada under Prime Minister Joe Clark to increase the quota for Southeast Asian refugees, most of whom were Vietnamese boat people. The quota thus went from 8,000 in 1979 to 50,000 over the next two years. Thanks to this decision, thousands of Vietnamese refugees were able to come to Canada to rebuild their lives.

Over the years, as Mayor of Ottawa, then as a federal Member of Parliament, and as a private citizen, Marion constantly supported the Vietnamese community. As a result, she was honoured at a show held in April 2005 in Los Angeles by *Thuy Nga*, a video production company well known in the overseas Vietnamese community. In April 2006, she was presented with the *Howard Adelman Award* for outstanding voluntary service by Thoi Bao, the largest Vietnamese newspaper in Canada. Most recently, on August 16, 2008, she was invited by the Vietnamese community in Calgary to give a keynote speech at a presentation of the movie *Bolinao 52* about a boat full of refugees that drifted at sea for 37 days in 1988.

In 2007-2008, Marion worked together with a small group of former volunteers of *Project 4000* in the preparation of a book on this project and its impact on Canada. As a result, the book *Gift of Freedom:*

How Ottawa welcomed the Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian refugees was written by author Brian Buckley. It was published and launched on May 3, 2008 at Ottawa City Hall under the auspices of the Vietnamese Canadian Centre, an affiliated organization of the Vietnamese Canadian Federation.

Marion was also a strong supporter of the Vietnamese Boat People Museum Project which was initiated by the Federation, and is currently underway.

Marion has passed away, but her spirit will rest forever in our hearts.

-30-

For immediate delivery: September 16, 2008

Vietnamese Canadian Federation

www.vietfederation.ca