

**TOP 7 OVER 70 NEWS RELEASE**

**Announcing the 2019 winners**

**of the Top 7 Over 70 awards**

**Sept. 12, 2019**

www.top7over70.com

**EMBARGOED UNTIL NOON, SEPT. 12, 2019**

Age is just a number. Proof of that adage is plentiful when one looks at the winners of Calgary’s 2019 Top 7 Over 70 awards, which recognizes achievements started by individuals after age 70.

This year’s recipients — announced Thursday — include an 80-year-old cardiologist doing leading edge cannabis research, an 83-year-old entrepreneur who has created a global charity and an 87-year-old who walked across the province two years ago to raise awareness of the need for grasslands preservation.

“The accomplishments of this year’s Top 7 Over 70 recipients are nothing short of remarkable,” said Jim Gray, the energy guru and philanthropist who in 2017 launched these biennial awards (held every two years.) “These individuals are achieving successes comparable to those reached by people of any age. They amply demonstrate the vital contributions older individuals can make — and are making — to our community.”

Here are this year’s Top 7 Over 70 recipients, who also happen to all be aged 80 and older:

1.) **Dr. Eldon Smith**, 80, had a brilliant career as a cardiovascular specialist and surgeon, but after retiring he began two new important paths after age 70. He saw the potential of a cannabinoid compound in treating inflammation in heart failure, so he conducted leading-edge research and formed a related company that he took public this year. Secondly, he has started a berry farm to grow and export the Haskup berry, which holds potential health and antioxidant benefits.

2.) **Sylvia Rempel**, 83, was an immigrant to Canada who started a small business called Sun Ice and grew it to become a $30-million company and Olympic supplier. In later years, she started a charitable program called Sewing Seeds that helps women in disadvantaged situations learn skills that improve their families’ situation and their own economic opportunities, both locally and globally.

3.) **Gus Yaki**, 87, is often called Calgary’s kingpin of birding and botany. He started the Friends of Fish Creek Provincial Park Society birding courses at age 72; these now run about 38 times a year. Gus also regularly monitors the Elbow River, Ghost River and Weaselhead area to do what he calls “bio blitzes,” recording species and removing invasive species, while also participating in national bird counts and raising significant dollars for conservation-based organizations. And, he is a tireless teacher, presenting at schools, parks, libraries and community centres. It’s estimated he’s presented to 7,000 people since turning 70 years of age.

Oh, and Gus also walked across the province two years ago to raise awareness and funds for grasslands preservation.

4.) **Dr. John Lacey**, 87, is a philanthropist who uses his business acumen to help arts groups and others raise millions of dollars. John has an international reputation for his innovation in oil and gas exploration and pipeline technology, but he became increasingly involved in a large number of arts, health, science and education ventures over the years. His many accomplishments include leading the CPO from bankruptcy protection to $24 million in growth and starting the Naomi and John Lacey Virtuoso Program to attract world-class talent such as Yo-Yo Ma and Renee Fleming to perform in Calgary.

5.) **Bob Brawn**, 82, had a distinguished and award-winning career in the energy industry for decades, along with a long list of community service endeavours that earned him recognition as a tireless leader and visionary. Since turning 70, those contributions continue to grow with two of those being: a.) A leading role in helping Heritage Park develop a new attraction that celebrates the natural resources industry; and, b.) Early stage development of a unique 34-acre senior retirement complex that will feature a myriad of housing options and recreational features.

6.) **Jacqueline Cameron**, 81, is living proof of her own motto: Something positive can come out of every situation. As a single mother of four children, she became one of Calgary’s top three real estate agents. After marrying and raising a blended family of 10 kids, her husband developed a rare disease, forcing him to use a wheelchair. Jackie then developed a line of flattering clothes for her husband and anyone with mobility challenges, to improve their quality of life and improve their self-esteem. She formed this company — Super-Fly Apparel — at age 75.

7.) **Ken Stephenson** was 70 when he led a major shift in the railway industry away from the use of wood or concrete railway ties to a superior and more economical product — steel ties. It’s one of his many business and community successes that occurred in later years, including that of being tapped to bring a cardiac imaging centre to Calgary about 16 years ago. This important technology was still quite new at the time; no such centres existed in Canada. But after years of work and effort Ken (now 86) was successful and the centre opened in 2005. It now performs 4,000 scans a year — only one other centre in North America matches this number.

**TOP 7 OVER 70 SPONSORS**

The Top 7 Over 70 program wouldn’t be possible with the support of our forward-thinking sponsors. They are true leaders in the community and we are grateful for their incredible support.

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**BACKGROUND**

**What is the Top 7 Over 70?**

The Top 7 Over 70 is an inspiring, biennial celebration (occurring every two years) that 1.) Recognizes Calgary and area individuals achieving remarkable success in a myriad of pursuits started after age 70; and, 2.) Helps kick start the economy by shining a light on an important resource in our community — older adults.

**Why is the program vital?**

It’s increasingly important to tap into the experience and potential of older individuals. Statistics Canada says our country now has more people aged 65-plus than children under 15, for the first time ever. And, by 2036, seniors could number between 9.9 million and 10.9 million in Canada. Top 7 Over 70 promotes the concept of communities better utilizing and engaging older individuals, who are practiced, prepared and proficient in a multitude of areas. To thrive as a society, it’s a vital direction.

**When do the recipients receive their awards?**

The 2019 Top 7 Over 70 awards will be presented at a gala on October 17 at the Hyatt Regency. Tickets can be purchased through a link at top7over70.com. The inaugural award gala in 2017 was a sell out, with 800 people in attendance.

**Who are the volunteers behind the Top 7 Over 70?**

 Jim Gray (Founder & Patron Chair); Linda McNally (Co-patron Chair); Bonnie DuPont (Executive Committee Chair); Brian Felesky; Steve Allan; Bev Foy; Cam Pekarsky; Cheryl Hamelin; Elizabeth Carson; Kim McConnell; Monica Zurowski; and, Sandi Gilbert.

**Who are the partners of the Top 7 Over 70 organization?**

There are two partner groups that receive proceeds from the Top 7 Over 70 event:

1.) Calgary Seniors Resource Society: This amazing organization provides a depth of support to local seniors, which creates meaningful and effective change in the overall well being and quality of life for vulnerable or isolated seniors in our city. More information is at CalgarySeniors.org.

2.) InterGen: These awards have led to the creation of InterGen — a talent development and matching platform that is helping to re-energize Calgary’s economy. In its pilot program, InterGen partnered experienced individuals with younger entrepreneurs, thus creating multigenerational teams that can rapidly scale growth. More details are at InterGenConnect.com.

For additional enquiries, or assistance in setting up interviews, contact Monica at 403-875-1222 or top7over70@gmail.com .