

Louis Armand Desrochers, CM, QC, LLD



Louis Armand Desrochers was born in Montreal, Quebec, in 1928. For his contributions to Alberta, to Canada and to the francophone community, he is credited with connecting Canadians and building national unity.

Born into the French language culture, Louis Desrochers learned early the value of both Canadian languages. He took his primary schooling in Quebec, then moved to Jasper, Alberta, with his widowed mother in 1939. With the move west, he was still able to continue his French education attending le Collège des Jésuites in Edmonton until 1942, and the Collège Saint-Jean d'Edmonton until 1947.

Louis Desrochers' post-secondary studies began with the completion of a Bachelor of Arts degree from University of Ottawa in 1949, studying at the Institute of Philosophy and igniting an interest in Canadian politics. After completing his law degree from the University of Alberta in 1952, he articulated with S.H. McCuaig, QC, and was admitted to the Alberta Bar in 1953. He remained with Mr. McCuaig in the practice of commercial and corporate law, and eventually became senior partner of McCuaig Desrochers. He was appointed as Queen's Counsel in 1970.

Outside of his busy law practice, he followed the example of his mentor Mr. McCuaig and became involved within his community. Louis Desrochers' reputation in his professional and volunteer roles earned him appointments and invitations to several committees.

He embraced the role of director of Radio Edmonton Limitée and was involved in the negotiations of the station's sale to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. He served successively as treasurer, vice president and president of the French-Canadian Association of Alberta.

From his community involvement, he earned an appointment to the University of Alberta Board of Governors in 1963, becoming vice chairman in 1966. Following that term, he was elected Chancellor of the University of Alberta, serving until 1974. Throughout his time with the University of Alberta, Louis Desrochers was a strong proponent and lobbyist for merger of the Collège Saint-Jean d'Edmonton with the university.

While this did not come to fruition during his term of chancellor, the process was underway and Faculté Saint-Jean became a full University of Alberta faculty in 1976. For 25 years, he served as president of the advisory committee at Faculté Saint-Jean, a position he resigned in 2000 and is now chair emeritus of that committee. The Louis Desrochers Professorship in Canadian Studies has been established in his honour to recognize his contributions to Alberta's and Canada's francophone community.

Committed to reshaping French language policy and law within the province, he was invited by the former Minister of Education (Learning) to serve as vice chairman of the French Language Working Group. The efforts of this committee resulted in amendments to the School Act and the implementation of francophone governance in Alberta.

Beyond his commitment to the francophone community, Louis Desrochers also extended his skills to other organizations, such as the Edmonton Family Service Bureau. In a role that led to president of the organization, he helped to elevate the organization's volunteer initiative to one that provided professionally operated services to a broader community base.

As an articulate and well-respected francophone, he was appointed by then Prime Minister John Diefenbaker to the Northwest Territories Council, serving from 1960 to 1963.

During decades of community service, he served as vice chairman of the advisory board of the Misericordia Hospital, member of the Canada Council, governor of the Glenbow-Alberta Institute and associate of the Devonian Group of Charitable Foundations. He also served as council member and second chairman of the Alberta Order of Excellence Council.

For five years Mr. Desrochers chaired the Board of Trustees of the Edmonton General Hospital (Grey Nuns) Foundation. He was the foundation's first chair and established the fund development program for what Albertans now recognize as the Caritas Hospitals Foundation. Mr. Desrochers also serves as honorary chairman of the Edmonton Community Foundation.

Mr. Desrochers was invited to join the Trilateral Commission, an organization of world leaders and influential figures representing Europe, Japan and North America. He served on this commission from 1974 to 1981.

In 1972, he was one of the founding directors of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, an independent think tank on public policy. Mr. Desrochers subsequently served as vice chairman of the organization, which remains active today.

He has long-standing service on many corporate boards, including the Royal Trust Edmonton Advisory Board, MacLab Enterprises, Shaw Communications Inc., Royal Trustco Limited, Northern Transportation Company Limited, Canada West Insurance Company, and l'Assurance-vie Desjardins. He also acted as director of the Bank of Montreal and was one its longest serving directors. He continues as honorary director.

For his work within Alberta and Canada, Louis Desrochers received numerous honours. He was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree from the University of Ottawa in 1971, and another from the University of Alberta in 1978. As well, he was awarded a doctor of science in education from Laval University in 1972. In 1994, Louis Armand Desrochers was inducted as a member of the Order of Canada.

Louis Desrochers married Marcelle Boutin in September 1953. The couple raised a family of four daughters and one son, all of whom are graduates of the Faculté Saint-Jean. The Desrochers live in Edmonton, where they enjoy the frequent company of their family, including 13 grandchildren.