

At our June 1st, 2018 Provincial Annual meeting at the Ivey Spencer Leadership Centre in London, The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, Lieutenant Governor of Ontario was the keynote speaker. The following is her speech in its entirety.

“IODE members, friends, mes chers amis: Good afternoon! Bonjour! Bozhoo! Shekóli.

As Lieutenant Governor I receive numerous invitations to make opening remarks of welcome to events. But this one is a particular pleasure as it is both special and personal. As an honorary patron of IODE, I know I am among kindred spirits.



It has been so inspiring to come to learn of the ongoing work that IODE and its local chapters undertake to help improve the lives of others.

Whether it is helping children to become kind, compassionate, and capable adults—global citizens, in fact—or sending clothes to many remote areas in the North, and also recognizing the contributions of veterans and first responders, it is clear that your devotion to your respective communities is a common feature embedded in the DNA of each chapter and its highly-committed members.

Thank you for your many displays of leadership and your unwavering dedication to building more just, sustainable, and resilient communities.

For any community to survive and thrive, it must be greater than the sum of its parts. To me, this means

that people of differing viewpoints must feel as if they have been heard and feel as though they belong.

Every day, however, we hear negative stories about the world in which we are living: a complex, interconnected, and fast-paced world confronting many challenges and divides, be they economic, sociological, political, or environmental.

As your Lieutenant Governor, I am not able to prescribe solutions, but I can still share with others what I have heard as Ontarians from all regions, backgrounds, education, and economic standings are searching for answers.

Against these mounting challenges, no doubt, it would be easy to turn inward. In fact, it is greatly tempting to do so. But much like you, I am an incurable optimist and know that we can overcome the dark path of isolationism and fake news. If we are bold enough to make investments in people and in their knowledge and confidence, there is no challenge too great for humanity.

This is why I so strongly support the work of organizations like IODE. Although our province has changed a great deal since the Ontario chapter was formed in 1920, the basic foundational values of compassion, empathy, and kindness maintain a constant and reassuring presence.

Together, you all promote Ontario as a place of opportunity and help take us from where we are to where we need to be. I believe that’s a story worth sharing!

In light of today’s presentation of this year’s Ontario Police Community Relations Award, and the Jean Throop Book Award, might I make two poignant observations:

The first is that today marks a wonderful occasion for us to reinforce the fact that one person can, indeed, make a difference. By putting one’s ideals into action, each of us can make a significant impact in our communities, and in our province, in order to build a better future together.

The second is that, in order to meet the needs of tomorrow, bold new ideas will be needed in order to bring about positive change. I strongly believe that when problems seem unsolvable, we must redouble our efforts and look for new ideas from new voices.

But how and where do we find these new voices and perspectives? In my humble experience, the best approach to finding common ground is to listen carefully and to share our own stories.



I often think of myself as Ontario's Storyteller-in-Chief. I have the privilege of hearing Ontarians' stories. I aim to shine a light on the things of which we are proud as well as those that challenge us. And I encourage all Ontarians to learn and share one another's stories, in order to foster the empathy that will help us understand one another, and to build a more cohesive society.

Stories are powerful vehicles for social change, but at the same time we must be cognizant that many voices of marginalized groups have not been adequately heard. The voices and visions of Indigenous people—and Indigenous women in particular—have been considered peripheral for too long. Their stories, however, are essential to understanding who we are and who we can be.

May I therefore take this opportunity to acknowledge the land on which this gathering is taking place. Today we are meeting on the traditional territory of Indigenous peoples dating back countless generations. Please join me in showing respect for their contributions and in recognizing the role of treaty-making in what is currently Ontario: hundreds of years after the first treaties were signed, they are still relevant today.

Last year, I asked 150 Ontarians to write 150 words about what meant to be an Ontarian. As an aside, it is my understanding that the Ontario branch of IODE has undertaken a similar exercise, too, this year called *Your Chapter's Story*. Well done!

I'd like to draw your attention to two stories that might have particular significance to today's group. The first came from Bonnie Schmidt, the founder of the education charity Let's Talk Science. Her story

speaks to the importance of volunteers as “special people who care enough to get involved”. This is important because it speaks to how you all take the time to get to know those who need help and understand what they are going through. You don't sit back and wait for someone else to step in.

The second story is from award-winning biomedical engineer Molly Shoichet. In her story, she says: “I grew up wanting it all — career and family. My Ontario gave me the opportunity to achieve that. As I have grown from a stubborn young girl to a determined woman, Ontario has given me the freedom and support to allow my curiosity to flourish, leading to inventions, advancements in knowledge, and new ways of exploring the world around us. With a passion to advance science and solve problems in medicine, my research group at the University of Toronto designs new strategies to overcome devastating diseases like blindness, stroke, and cancer. As a mother of two sons, I realize that we must raise our sons and daughters to value professional women in all careers. My Ontario allows us to dream of a better world. My Ontario makes things happen. Together we can shape our future.”



The way I see it, for women in particular, education is a pathway to self-actualization and economic independence.

Education can transform us into responsible, global citizens: It helps us to understand our rights and

embrace our civic responsibilities.

Education equips us with knowledge and self-confidence to make a personal commitment to address issues such as inequality, injustice, poverty, and environmental responsibility.

At the same time, however, the barriers to full and effective participation in society are often silent and systemic - those of us who are in relatively privileged positions might not even notice. With open minds and hearts, we must ensure that all women are offered a seat at the table.

I commend you for your work in providing a forum for women to meet, to network, and to share their stories of their dreams, successes, and also, failures. That is empowerment. Empowerment is a big word and it takes courage, but IODE is helping build much-needed capacity.

All of today's participants are invaluable sources of inspiration. Your remarkable achievements have

contributed to the very heart and soul of our society. You demonstrate the meaning of responsible citizenship.

Moreover, you clearly show us that life and work have meaning. You have been willing to invest in your communities. You have accepted responsibility with amazing generosity of spirit and without any expectation of public recognition.

I hope that you will continue to do what you are doing. Your deeds will help motivate a new generation of Ontarians to join your ranks and are an inspiration to all who look to follow your example.

I wish you a most productive afternoon, and I look forward to hearing about, and being inspired by, the action agenda that you set, and indeed, by all of the ideas that emerge to celebrate IODE's 100th anniversary in 2020!

Thank you. Merci. Miigwetch. Yaww'."

L-R Provincial Secretary Kathy Newnes, 2nd Vice President Shirley Ann Elms, Lieutenant Governor The Honourable Elizabeth Dowdeswell, President Renate Schuetz, 1st Vice President Linda Gryner, Treasurer Karen Barker

