

# Epic Achievements



THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF EPIC OPPORTUNITIES

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Heidi MacArthur says meeting so many great people was the best part of her job.

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Preparations are well underway for this year's An Evening With Epic fundraiser.

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Darlene says MTEC provided her with the skills and confidence she needed to pursue her career goals.

## Non-profit College Offers 'Awesome Opportunity'

**A** new vocational school is helping people supported by Epic Opportunities secure employment in the tourism, hospitality and retail sectors.

The Manitoba Tourism Education College (MTEC) was established by the Manitoba Tourism Education Council in November 2014. The mandate of the not-for-profit private school is to assist the local tourism industry by providing training for prospective managers, supervisors and other employees.

Students enrolled in the college receive six to eight weeks of in-class training as well as a 30-hour practicum with an industry partner. Although exact numbers are not yet available, MTEC officials say the vast majority of the school's students have found employment soon after graduation. To date, two people supported by Epic Opportunities have participated in MTEC training programs while a third is scheduled to take part sometime later this year.

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Epic Opportunities offers holistic, person-centred supports to empower people to live, learn, work and enjoy life in the community.

Each of our locations offers a wide range of supports based on a person's interests, needs, goals and dreams.

As a non-profit, charitable organization, Epic Opportunities operates under the direction of a volunteer board of directors.

The board meets monthly and is made up of committees that provide input for policies, governance and operations.

Board members are elected from the general membership at our annual general meeting in June.



## Helping Build Relationships

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One person has already secured employment at a prominent Winnipeg hotel.

While the college is open to everyone, Epic Opportunities Employment Consultant Heidrun Bittner says it offers people with intellectual disabilities an “awesome opportunity” that isn’t always available to them.

Bittner says the education and work experience they gain by enrolling at the college puts them on more even footing with other potential employees and makes them more attractive candidates in the eyes of employers.

“Employers are always looking for educated employees. That’s why we thought it would be a great thing for people we support to get an education and work experience to help them get a foot in the door,” she says. “It’s also a great opportunity to build relationships with employers and show them what people with intellectual disabilities are able to do.”

Bittner says one of the advantages MTEC has over other private vocational schools is that it offers shorter programs (classes are six to eight weeks in length) at more affordable rates (tuition is \$1,500 for most students).

Darlene has been supported by Epic Opportunities since 1993 and is the agency’s first graduate of MTEC. She graduated from the

college’s housekeeping room attendant training program last October and is now working as a breakfast attendant at the Super 8 hotel on Portage Avenue.

Although she had been interested in working in the hotel industry for some time, Darlene had become frustrated after being passed over for jobs she had applied for. She says the program at MTEC provided her with the skills and confidence she needed to pursue her career goals.

“I really liked it. It was very good. I learned a lot of different stuff like [how to handle] chemicals and guest services and first aid and CPR,” she says. “The instructors were really helpful too. At first I was kind of nervous. But they would keep telling me ‘You can do it.’ I was so happy when I passed. I was excited I did it.”

That kind of reaction is music to the ears of Shannon Fontaine, CEO of the college and the Manitoba Tourism Education Council.

Fontaine says college officials have made every effort to make all of the programs MTEC offers inclusive regardless of a person’s ability or experience.

“We want to try and be as inclusive as we can be. We’ve never gone and recruited any one group specifically,” she says. “If a person is a good fit and has the interest and the ability, why not train them? Businesses are looking for employees who can do the job.”

# Familiar Face Bids A Fond Farewell

She didn't have a fancy office and typically avoided the spotlight, but few people had a larger presence at Epic Opportunities over the past eight years than Heidi MacArthur.

In her role as Administrative Assistant, Heidi was usually the first person to greet individuals and family members who received support from Epic Opportunities when they visited the organization's Dublin Avenue head office. She was also the go-to person for staff when they needed help with everything from figuring out how to operate the photocopier to booking a meeting room or organizing their office.

Little wonder that a multitude of well-wishers paid tribute to her after she announced her retirement last month. Her final day on the job was Aug. 31, which coincidentally just happened to be her birthday.

"Of course it was a tough decision to make," she says of her decision to retire. "I'm going to miss the people the most – the people I worked with as well as the people we serve. They offered me so much joy and happiness."

While she had been contemplating retirement for some time, Heidi acknowledged the process was sped up somewhat by her elderly mother's declining health and a desire to spend more time with her in Thunder Bay.

Although Winnipeg will remain home for Heidi and her husband Craig for the time being, she plans to commute back and forth between here and North-western Ontario to help with her mother's care.

"My family is really the main thing I concern myself with," says Heidi, who has two children, Josh and Julia. "Everything else can go to the wayside as long as my family is OK. Both Craig's and my parents emphasized that. Our parents would do anything for anybody who needed help."

That desire to help others extended to Heidi's coworkers. She had an innate ability for remembering little things that meant so much to those she



Heidi MacArthur was often one of the first people visitors to Epic Opportunities met.

came in contact with. For people like Coordinator Carey Richards, Heidi was like a second mom.

"Heidi has this amazing gift at making everybody she comes in contact with feel special. For so long I thought I was special and then I realized that Heidi remembered all the things for everybody and that probably everybody feels equally as special as I do," Carey says.

"I can't count the number of times she came to my rescue when I needed help with something and she helped in her gentle, calm, reassuring way. Heidi taught me so much about how to treat people."

Human Resources Coordinator Kristin Oswald says Heidi will continue to have an impact on all the staff and families she came into contact with at Epic Opportunities.

"People are going to remember those things that were unique to her and how she cared for each and every one of us," Kristin says. "It's almost like she instilled a piece of herself in each of us."

In addition to spending more time with family, Heidi says retirement will allow her to devote more energy to her art. "That's my passion," she says. She's also hoping to get more involved in urban gardening and spend more time travelling with her husband.

# An Evening Of Fun and Entertainment

Preparations are well underway for this year's An Evening With Epic, the primary fundraiser for the Epic Opportunities Foundation.

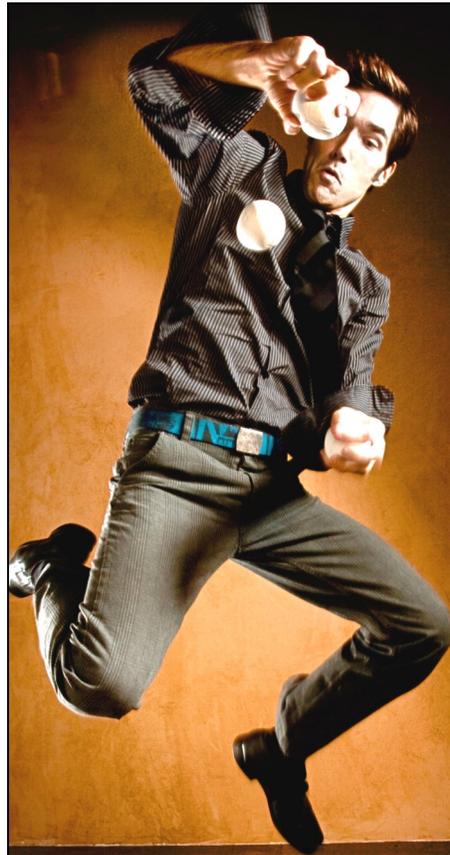
This year's event will take place Thurs., Nov. 3 at the Viscount Gort Hotel at 1670 Portage Ave. All funds raised will be used to purchase an accessible home for people with intellectual disabilities served by Epic Opportunities.

Executive Director Ruby Reimer says An Evening With Epic is a great time for a great cause and is an excellent opportunity for supporters of the organization to come together to share some camaraderie.

"Our hope is that we provide an evening that offers a fun and entertaining atmosphere for our guests while at the same time raising support for new housing initiatives in the community," she says.

Entertainment at this year's An Evening With Epic will be provided by Josh Casey, who has toured across North America with his interactive comedy and juggling show.

Casey has performed in front of sellout crowds in Canada and the U.S. at a number of different events and venues including the K-Days family fair in Edmonton, the Alaska State Fair, New York's Palace of Variety Arts and the



Comedian and juggler Josh Casey will be the headline performer at this year's An Evening With Epic annual fundraiser.

Ann Arbor Comedy Showcase. In addition, he is co-founder of the Madison Circus Space, a practice centre for circus artists in Madison, Wis., and holds the Guinness World Record for sitting on the most whoopee cushions in 30 seconds.

Reimer says An Evening With Epic has continued to grow since its inception. She says the support of the local business community has played a key role helping to make it bigger and better each year.

"The support of the business community is very important to us and an event like this really symbolizes how a not-for-profit such as Epic Opportunities and the business community can support each other. It's very much a reciprocal relationship," she says.

Reimer adds that the organization is thrilled to once again have former radio broadcaster Caroline Hunter serve as the master of ceremonies for An Evening With Epic.

"She so clearly represents the passion for what we do and helps to make it such a fun evening for everyone in attendance."

Another key contributor to the success of An Evening With Epic has been Epic Opportunities staff. Reimer says staff members play a vital role in organizing the annual event, whether it's connecting with local businesses for prize contributions for the evening's rainbow and silent auctions or greeting guests when they arrive. One of those contributors was Community Outcomes Assistant Marie Sereneo, who spent nine weeks with the organization this summer as part of a Government of Canada youth employment initiative and helped organize the prize draws.

Tickets for An Evening With Epic are \$25 each and are available by contacting the Epic Opportunities office at 204-982-4673 or [info@epicmb.ca](mailto:info@epicmb.ca).