

Manitoba Loses a Handbell Pioneer

AUDREY ETHELLA JONES 1928 - 2018

Audrey Jones, a long-time handbell pioneer in our province passed away March 29, 2018 on her 90th birthday.

She will be lovingly remembered by her niece Jerrilyn Jones, her nephews Martin, Brian, Peter and Andrew Jones and their families.

Audrey was predeceased by her parents Elizabeth Amelia (Ethella) and Percy Victor Ernest Jones, her brothers E. Lloyd Jones and Ralph Jones, nephew Greg, and niece Margot Jones.

Audrey was born in Winnipeg and lived there her entire life. She attended Gordon Bell High School and the University of Manitoba. She graduated with a BSc and was the Lady Stick of the Faculty of Science.

Audrey was a gifted student-athlete, a successful volleyball and cheer leading coach, an exceptional educator and most of all a force of nature. She taught at Technical-Vocational High School from its founding in 1951 until her retirement in 1985. She maintained close ties with the school after her retirement and in 2004 the physical education and music wing of the school was named the Audrey Jones Field House. In 2012 she was inducted into the Manitoba High Schools Athletic Association Hall of Fame in their Builder Category.

Audrey loved her work and she loved her 'kids'. We believe she invented tough love...or at the very least perfected it. She said in an interview in the Winnipeg Free Press in 2004 that she *"didn't like Saturdays because it meant I wasn't working"*. Time not spent at the school was often spent with her bell ringers.

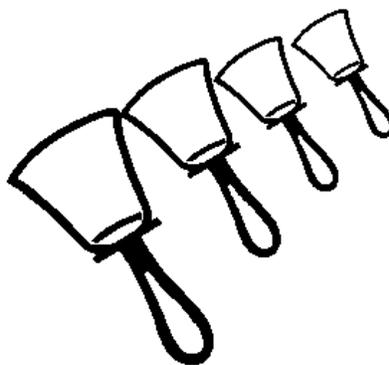
Since its opening in 1951, Tec-Voc has always had a band program and was directed by Fred Merrett. A two octave set of Schulmerich Handbells was acquired in April 1966 and used by bell ringers in the classroom and as an extra-curricular activity. During the 1967-1968 school term, the dozen girls ringing handbells also appeared with the band as Majorettes, trained by Audrey.

The Technical-Vocational High School Handbell Ringers, under the direction of Fred Merrett and Assistant Director Audrey Jones made a recording that term and received high marks in the Manitoba Musical Festival.



1967-1968 Technical-Vocational High School Handbell Ringers

Fred M. Merrett (Director) Audrey Jones (Assistant Director)



A second recording followed a while later. When Mr. Merrett moved to Edmonton in 1973, Audrey became the sole director of the “Belles” and a third album by the Tec-Voc Handbell Ringers was produced in 1974. By now, they had acquired 3 ½ octaves of Schulmerich handbells. Many of their selections had been arranged by Mr. Merrett. They continued to receive high praise from festival adjudicators and appeared on national television with the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra.



Stereo Album Three 1974 with Director Audrey Jones



By the fourth recording in 1980 the Tec-Voc Handbell Choir had performed in western Canada, the northern United States and as far away as Norway. They had proven themselves to be ambassadors of good will and good music, travelling far and wide as representatives of Winnipeg's Technical-Vocational High School.



Stereo Album Four 1980 Tec-Voc Handbell Ringers 1980





Tec-Voc Handbell Choir 1980

Upon her retirement, Audrey purchased the set of Schulmerich handbells from Tec-Voc High School and began directing three handbell choirs, the experienced Tec-Voc Alumni Ringers, and two handbell choirs at McClure United Church. It was her Tec-Voc Alumni that performed many times at concerts, senior citizen residences, nursing homes, churches, community events and conferences, sometimes travelling out of town.

Audrey also rang bells herself with the University Women's Club Handbell Choir for many years under the direction of Marilyn Mensforth (1980-1994), Rosemary Malaher (1994-1995), Louise Enns (1995-1999) and Morna-June Morrow (1999-2008). In recognition of her 42 years' involvement in the pioneering of handbell ringing in Manitoba, Audrey was presented with an Honorary Life Membership by the Manitoba Guild of English Handbell Ringers in 2008.

When Audrey had to move out of her condo and move into Deer Lodge Care Centre, she generously donated her handbells and music to McClure United Church.

Her Service of Remembrance was held Friday, April 6, 2018 at McClure United Church. The family would like to thank the staff at Deer Lodge Centre for their care for Audrey.



Portrait of Audrey, handbell and flowers at the memorial service



Condolences from McClure United Church



Portrait of Audrey conducting the Tec-Voc Alumni Ringers

The devotion of her many students and colleagues was maintained throughout her lifetime. So many students spoke of the great influence Audrey's "tough love" had on them as they matured into adulthood and gave them the confidence to pursue their achievements with great enthusiasm. One student said *"Miss Jones was an absolute pistol!"* Another former student, Joy Cotte Wales had this to say: *"I came to Tec-Voc in 1977 as a quiet and shy young woman. My very wise homeroom and art teacher, Mr. Johnson, introduced me to Miss Jones and her bell group. I was with the group all three years and loved Miss Jones dearly. She was a firecracker who, at times, was a wee bit scary, but she drew out the best in all of us and made us stronger and better for having known her. Being a bell ringer is one of my warmest and most rewarding memories. Miss Jones worked tirelessly with us to make us confident and proud musicians (most of us could not read a note of music in the beginning!) and we even cut a record my last year there! Entertaining the seniors and the less fortunate all around Winnipeg with the groups was a privilege, as was knowing Audrey Jones."*