

# **SPIRIT**

***783 (Calgary) Wing Newsletter***

***ROYAL CANADIAN  
AIR FORCE  
ASSOCIATION***

[www.783afacwingcalgary.ca](http://www.783afacwingcalgary.ca)



***Wing Meets every  
4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday at 7pm  
285 Legion Horton Road***



**MEET THE TEAM**

<http://783afacwingcalgary.ca/>

Chairperson	Rob Caswell
Honorary Chairperson	Col (Retd) Don Matthews
Immediate Past Chairperson	Randy Fisher
First Vice Chairperson	Michelle Gerwing
Second Vice Chairperson	Scott Deederly
Treasurer	Kenn Nixon
Secretary	Cecilia Brugma
Past Chairs Advisory Council	Pat Sulek
Casino Chairperson	Darlene Laroche
Friends of Col Belcher	Pat Sulek
Membership	Anna Lewis
Newsletter	Bev Spielman/Michelle Gerwing
Health and Wellness	Michele Henderson
Sergeant at Arms	Art Hill
Entertainment Chair	Muriel Mymko
Public Relations	Bob Wade
Military Museum Liaison	Bob Wade
Cadet Liaison	Kevin Knight
Advocacy	Scott Deederly
Historian	Grant Whitson
Webmaster/Social Media	Kent Anderson





## *Message from the Chairperson*



It is almost impossible to believe that we had just sat down for our November meeting, and then there we were: gathered in-person and online for January. My wife often reminds me that the “months go slow and the years go fast” however I am convinced someone has reached over and turned up the treadmill speed on the pace of life.

A happiness out of that is the renewed pace of the Wing. After a successful Christmas party and our final meeting of 2022—and what I hope was rest, joy in gathering with loved ones, and just one more plate of holiday food was enjoyed by our members—we have certainly hit a high ‘op tempo’ to kick-off 2023.

The Past President’s Flight has done yeoman’s work on a few fronts: the first being the great importance of recognition of our Wing members by putting forward nominations for Group (and National) awards; the second the incredible work and thought into how we support our community and the causes that align with our mission as a Wing of the Royal Canadian Air Force Association. I am beyond pleased—and frankly quite excited—to see the collection of initiatives the Wing membership endorsed to support at our January meeting.

I look forward to the coming change of season and hosting the Alberta Group AGM, our Charter Dinner, planning for RCAF 100, and before we know it, it will be time for our AGM. Before then, we will gather for a wine and cheese, invite our beneficiaries to meet the Wing, and continue on our path of advocacy, remembrance, heritage, and camaraderie.

Per Ardua Ad Astra

Rob Caswell CD, AdeC  
Chairman  
783 (Calgary) Wing



## *Happy Birthday to you (Jan/Feb)*

Margaret McAllister	2 Jan
Kris VanAppeldorn	2 Jan
Marie Harvey	9 Jan
Angele Mullins	11 Jan
Gary Gibson	14 Jan
Ashley Rosales-Spielman	15 Jan
Myra Empey	16 Jan
Michael Mullane	18 Jan
Kendra Fisher	19 Jan
Gord Todd	20 Jan
Keith Spielman	24 Jan
Brandon Lewis	30 Jan
Glenn Traub	3 Feb
Edith McMinn	4 Feb
John Stanford	6 Feb
Bob White	7 Feb
Francesca Fisico	9 Feb
Andrew Spielman	10 Feb
Stuart Craig	13 Feb
Daphne Ter Kuile	19 Feb
Anna Lewis	22 Feb
Susan Clarke	23 Feb
Mike Inglis	27 Feb



## *Stories from the past by Bev Spielman*

Allen and I joined 701 Wing (he with the wing, me with the Ladies Aux.) in 1970. The wing met at the Alexandria School on 9<sup>th</sup> Ave. SE at that time. We worked the Bingo's which were held weekly, and Art Hill was doing the calling. He was famous for his "Legs 11" and "66 clickety click" plus other numbers that he invented.

The first Alberta Group AGM we went to was in Banff. Members from 700 Wing, 702 Wing, 703 Wing, 705 Wing, 701 Wing and 767 Wing attended. The Friday meet and greet was rather raucous and the next morning, the host committee would go to everyone's room at 7:00 AM to dispense a glass of orange juice and champagne. This did not always wake you up, but simply refueled you for the day.

The hotel pool cleaning service had hoses all over the hallways, and Helen Hill had met Allen coming out of our room, and looked down to where he was straddling one of the hoses. Looking him in the eye, she asked "Is that all yours?" He went beet red and took off as we all stood there laughing. Irene Witcher had entered the morning breakfast room, put her purse on the end of a table and watched in horror as the whole table collapsed sending everything (glasses, juice, food) onto the floor.

The person from 702 Wing Lethbridge gave the Toast to the Ladies which actually turned out to be 1000 insults to women. He was booed and asked to leave the banquet. As I remember, that was the last AGM held in Banff.

The Wing held monthly dances and other events and after each party, we would close the doors (after God Save the Queen) and proceed to empty all the heels of liquor that was left. Then we would reset the room for the bingos. Stick handled home when the sun was coming up.

At that time there was a rule (enforced by Charlie Witcher) that if you damaged any wing property, you would have to replace it. Well one evening, Allen had worked the afternoon shift at Spy Hill Jail and came to the wing dance right after, getting there at midnight. However, because the clocks were to be turned back, it was decided we could keep the wing open for an extra hour. Allen went to change the clock (which was 15 feet up (this was a school gym) back the one hour. Instead of getting the ladder from the storage, he climbed onto a chair, which was on top of a table to do this. Needless to say, the clock fell, just missing Barb Barron walking by and smashed on the ground. Allen was still standing on top of everything and I was wielding the broom threatening him with it. Everyone was watching Charlie to see what would happen. For the first time since I had met him, he actually roared with laughter and the tension was gone. For the record, Allen did replace the clock and we kept the remnants of the old one in our bar for years.

Another successful evening at the Wing.

## 701/767 Wing

The two wings in Calgary had reached a point when 701 was losing the school gym as the city was taking it back. 767 Wing was running out of money but they did have the quarters ( the Lone Pine Supper Club). Allen was President of 701 and Jack Bennett was President of 767 and they collaborated in merging the two wings in 1974.

There was some push back on this idea as 767 had originally been looked at as "Officers Mess" type and the 701 were the non coms. This attitude lasted for many years, until it was decided to change the number to 783 Wing. The change happened and in 1975 Calgary held the Group AGM. This was held at the Calgary Inn (The Westin). Several things happened at this one. On the meet and greet, someone picked up a cigarette ashtray (actually planter with sand ) filled it with beer and travelled all over the hotel with it. They even visited other groups and parties to sing Happy Birthday to everyone. Bill Sorokin, from 700 Wing had gone to bed (passed out) and his wife opened the door and let a bunch in. They promptly emptied boxes of cereal, sugar and milk, all over Bill and left. You can imagine the mess he woke up in. The hotel charged them extra for having to clean this up.

The banquet was held in Marco's restaurant across the street from the hotel. The hotel had pushed all the counters behind curtains so everything looked pretty good. One member from 700 Wing (again) had slipped behind and cleared all the cereal boxes which he kept putting into Allen's tuxedo pockets. This eventually resulted in him being nicknamed "the Cornflakes Kid". This triggered a series of many practical jokes which could fill a book on their own. I will tell you some of them later. This AGM also introduced our first "Flasher". One person (name withheld) dashed through the hotel and banquet stark naked except for a mask and nearly knocked Helen Hill over in his rush. I don't think Helen ever got over that.

During this period, Calgary's "stroll" was in front of the hotel. Eleanor and Barney Berlin were on the hosting committee and were showing up for their shift. Barney couldn't find a parking space for his truck, so he dropped Eleanor in front of the hotel telling her to wait for him. Well Eleanor was walking back and forth, not thinking about the other "girls" also walking back and forth, until she heard two men say "Don't you think that one is a little old to be hooking?" When she and Barney finally got into the hotel she was doubled over with laughter telling us all the story. We have laughed about this for years.

Another small tradition popped up at this AGM. When Jack and Irene Bennett would leave at the end of the evening, everyone would sing "Irene Goodnight". This carried on for at least 20 years. Funny how little things can turn into fun and poignant memories.

We had a belly dancer at one wing dance and Barry Davidson , drink in hand and his pipe in his mouth, went to put a dollar bill in the dancers bra. This would have been okay, except he accidentally caught the bra catch in his cuff and popped it open. So Barry was caught "red handed" with a topless dancer, his drink spilled, and his pipe on the floor. He never lived that down. Who would have thought the "Scrounger" from the POW camp could be left speechless.

There was another tradition created at the wing, which was known as the "B & B Club". This was a very exclusive club. Admission meant you had to buy a bottle of B&B, each and then you all stood at the bar and shot killed the bottle. There was more than one member of this group who never saw the end of the evening, as they were bundled up and taken home by some irate spouses.

Every meeting was convened with the marching in of the colors. This was sometimes a very chancy event as we had one member (Mary) who would carry a flag but she never got the concept that you don't carry it too high, otherwise you would get caught in the chandeliers. So most meetings started with "Mary, watch the lights" instead of the official opening.

The President at the time, was a bit of a chauvinist and wouldn't let the women speak at meetings. His wife talked him into having a female spokesperson for the women. That person ended up being me. If the women wanted something raised and discussed it was up to me to bring it to the floor. Can you see this happening in this day and age? Not bloody likely!

In 1980 Calgary hosted the National AGM. It was held at the Calgary Inn (Westin) and was a huge success. We utilized the wing quarters for the spousal program, and the final Wingding. We had about 400 women we had to look after for four days.

We held an open room coffee party on the first day at the hotel. Day two saw us take them on a bus tour around the north part of the city, coffee at the zoo atrium and back to the wing for lunch. Neil Gow led the ladies out to the buses with his trumpet so he looked a little like the Pied Piper with four buses of chicks behind him. We had Miss Molly from the stampede entertain, lots of little freebees on the tables and a whole lot of fun. Day two the tour went to the south part of the city, back to the wing for lunch and a fashion show. We combined fashions from Holt Renfrew and from the Native Calgarians group. It was a great event. We had raffles, gifts for all and back to the hotel. On day three, we had a wrap up lunch at the hotel which was hosted by Arnie Bauer (Vice President of National). It was there we were able to introduce all the hard working members of the committee. On the last day, the wing hosted the goodbye party at the wing quarters with a BBQ. I was so glad to see the end of that week, I thought I would go to sleep and not wake up for a month. Of course we were working with an extremely low budget so a lot of things were created by necessity. We couldn't afford flowers for the luncheon tables, so I got the idea of having some of the ladies go raid the ditches. This was fall, so there were lots of bull rushes, Indian Paint Brushes and stalks of left over wheat etc. available. Some of our crafty ladies took these, and made some of the most beautiful centrepieces you ever saw. Cost? About 50 cents apiece. I had friends who were in the carnival business, and their specialty was lollipops. They made me enough for the AGM and they were all inscribed with 'CALGARY 1980'. Kendall and Karen and I made frustration pencils which were included at their places. Cost? Again about 30 cents. Altogether we put on the program for about \$1200. We raised the money by working the bingo coffee stations, waiting on tables in the dining room of the wing for tips and setting up a flea market table for three weekends. Dear Eleanor rose to the occasion again when I asked her if she could lay her hands on some (some) wild rose stuff to make corsages. Give her a job and away she goes. She went to Eaton's window dressing department and asked if she could have some wild rose flowers from their spring showing. Some one in the department said "HELP YOURSELF" So she took them at their word and cleaned out the display. Every lady received a beautiful corsage made by our crafty group. She could have sold a fridge to an Eskimo, she was that good,.

During the two years prep time we had, Eleanor would call me at work, every day, with an idea or thought. The conversation would go "me-hello, Eleanor- it's me. Yes Eleanor? I think we should do this or that for the AGM. Before I could say good idea, or not, she would say Ok, and hang up. This went on for two whole years! She had a big heart, but she was a loose cannon sometimes.

If we were planning a tea or other entertainment, you could always count on Eleanor to make sure the women in the wing were given their roles and that they got the job done. If you took a good look at her, you would think she was someone's meek little grandma; nothing could have been further from the truth. She was a process server and anybody who was served never expected this "ditzzy little blond" could get them. It didn't matter how a room was set for a candlelight dinner or function, Eleanor would come in and rearrange the tables. She was a natural furniture mover. To this day, I can still hear her giving orders but in such a way, no one usually took offense.

We had other members who went above and beyond serving the wing. Marion Mascaro was our financial guru. She handled the tickets, the money and the books for over 20 years. Marion was also responsible for booking a young farmer for one of our stampede breakfasts. He arrived, set up, entertained us for the whole morning and then went onto other bookings. That young man turned out to be George Fox. The rest, as they say, is history.

When I was president, we set up a catering committee, to help cut down on costs for banquets etc. Everyone pitched in and between the bar, catering and other functions we were able to make our rent each month for a long time. This also helped when we were assisting the Cadets with their Mess Dinners. The cadets enjoyed a formal dinner with all the RCAF traditions thereby teaching them proper etiquette and decorum. We would have them come in and set the table with all the cutlery, glasses, napkins and condiments while we cooked and prepared the meal. This usually worked quite well although we had a few mishaps. One in particular stands out in my mind; we usually served gingerale as the white wine and cranberry juice as the port. Marion put the jugs of gingerale in the upright cooler we had on the top shelf. Underneath that we had a huge bowl of washed romaine lettuce crisping waiting to be mixed for the salad course. While the cadets were enjoying their soup, the shelf collapsed and we had pop in the salad, all over the kitchen floor and everyone shrieking quietly so we wouldn't disturb the dinner. It was a miracle that the lettuce was re-washed, dried and prepared to be served within 10 minutes. We all were squelching around the kitchen in pop until we could free one person to quickly grab a mop and bucket to clean the floor. We never stored the jugs of pop or juice on the upper shelves again. As far as the banquet goes – they never suspected anything had happened.

We catered to some outside groups even though we weren't licensed to do so. We got around this by having members sign these people in as their guests. The wing put on dinners for bowling groups, company parties, Christmas parties, weddings, anniversaries and in wing functions like a miniature golf tournament, Hawaiian Night, (with actual Hawaiian entertainers), Group AGM's Grandparents Christmas parties and fashion shows. The grandparent party never cost anyone as all the gifts for the kids, the food and entertainment was paid for by members donating their tips to cover the cost. We did the New Years party, with Charlie making his famous salads, Irene making the buns, Allen and myself cooking the meat and Marion doing the salmon and some of the desserts. The cost for a really great feast cost the members \$15 for their ticket.



After Wally Gryba passed away, it was decided that the wing would set up a scholarship in his name. This was called the Wally Gryba Memorial Scholarship for Effective Speaking (forerunner to the Jack Bennett Memorial). The members of the catering committee again donated the tips we made from banquets and parties to this cause. Again, the cadets benefitted from the wing's participation.

Alberta Group AGM's were a great source of fun. There always was a great competition to see who could put on the best event. Lethbridge hosted one year that saw the ladies visit a Hutterite Colony. They weren't back by the time the cocktail hour arrived and the husbands were getting a little worried. They eventually came back and you could hear the busload of them, as they had thoroughly enjoyed the Rhubarb wine they had been given. They didn't have time to change for the banquet so there was a mixed bag of outfits of slacks, jeans and casual dress alongside their immaculate husbands in Tuxes.

Red Deer hosted one time and the banquet's guest speaker went on for an hour and 20 minutes. He finally stopped to catch his breath and the emcee jumped to his feet thanking him for his inspiring talk. Later, when the band started playing, (a bunch of old timers) whose most up to date song was Oobla-dee , a group of Grim Reapers (motorcycle club) decided to join us. They marched in, put their cases of beer on a couple of tables and sat down. Everyone kept telling Allen to get rid of them (he was a correctional officer) so he should be able to tell them to go. He just looked at them, said wait for a few minutes, they won't stick around. Sure enough, after about 15 minutes of listening to "down in the valley, and a few more scintillating songs" the group got up, wished us all a good night, and some even felt sorry for us having to listen to this, and left the party. That was also the year that Charlie Witcher became Group President. Unfortunately Charlie had eaten a pizza the night before and developed food poisoning so he missed the banquet. That was also the year that Scotty Burns (Red Deer member) fell off the pathway in the Red Deer Lodge hotel atrium into the swimming pool on his way to the banquet. He attended the banquet still in his wet clothes, but no one wanted to sit by him. He eventually passed out and the guys removed him, putting him to bed, still fully clothed and still wet.

In Edmonton, we usually stayed at the Chateau Louis, and walked over to the wing, right beside the hotel. Tom Campbell was wing president at the time and after enjoying happy hour in our room, headed back to his own for a quick shower. His wife Becky had called room service for a cup of tea and when it arrived, Tom had been out of his shower but wasn't dressed yet. He ran over and hid behind the curtains while Becky got her tea from the waiter. Unfortunately for Tom, he didn't realize he was mooning the people at the bus stop right outside his window on Kingsway. At least it was his backside that was exposed.

When Taber (737) wing joined group, they hosted their first group AGM. Hector and Teresa (Mother Teresa) were in charge of registration. Gayle Tsuji was the Wing president and a member of the Air Cadet Committee. Allen was Western Regional Director at the time, and he was sent to the Prairies AGM as the NEC rep and AVM Gord Ockenden was sent to Alberta. Well somehow there was a slip up in the rooms and Gord ended up being my room mate. I was emcee and introduced him as such. Teresa nearly had a heart attack and made sure he and I had our own separate room. He went out to dinner on that story for many years. There are so many stories about Hector and Teresa that I could fill a book on them alone.

When Taber got their charter, Calgary took about 30 members down to help them celebrate. Most of us stayed in Lethbridge and travelled to Taber with Mickey Porter in his motor home. Needless to say the bar was flowing freely and we were stacked like cordwood . If we had been stopped Mickey probably would have had the motor home impounded.

Anyway, during the evening, Edith Carlin got into a discussion about pepper, the origin of same and how did it grow etc.?. By the time we got back to Lethbridge, got to bed, and settled for the night, the phone rang in our room at 2:45 am. It was Edith telling me the history of pepper. Where she got the info I have no idea as there wasn't any computer in that day.

When Cold Lake was formed, Calgary took two 15 passenger vans full up for their first charter night. The Lakeland Inn was never the same. Bob Row had initiated the formation of the wing and it was very successful for many years, with having the base to draw members from.

Alberta has always been successful in electing several National Presidents (Chairs), National Directors, such as Fred Way, Wally Gryba, Al Karlen, John Melbourne and Steve MacDonnell. Al Spielman and Grant Whitson were members of the NEC and I was the first female Wing President, and Group President of Alberta and National. We cracked the glass ceiling!

I cannot imagine what life would have been like without all the experiences we enjoyed over the years. Hopefully the traditions will carry on, the protocols still be relevant and the memories continue to be created.

# Remembrance Day 2022





# reminder

***From your Membership Director:***

*Please contact Anna Lewis, our Director of Membership, if you change any contact info at [bandalewis@shaw.ca](mailto:bandalewis@shaw.ca)*

***From your Health and Wellness Director***

*All Wing members already receive birthday cards. Do you know of anyone in our membership who would appreciate receiving a card of congratulations, or perhaps a card to raise their spirits? Greetings could be sent for many reasons, such as:*

- a “milestone” birthday*
- best wishes for someone in hospital or convalescing at home*
- bereavement on the passing of a Wing member*
- retirement*
- graduation*
- marriage*
- a special wedding anniversary*
- receiving recognition and/or winning an award*

*All members are encouraged to contact Michèle Henderson at [michlorr@shaw.ca](mailto:michlorr@shaw.ca) at any time during the year with the person’s name, the event, and the date on which it is to be recognized.*

*A quick reminder that our casino will be held the 13th and 14th Apr at the Elbow River Casino.*

*Our Alberta Group AGM will be held the 21st and 22nd of April at the Blackfoot Inn. The banquet and Charter Tea will be held on the 22nd.*