

THE MEDICINE HAT MALL PRESENTS:

FUTURE VISION

WOMEN TO WATCH IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM



Too Busy to Say NO

Strong, passionate, gutsy: the types of women who will be featured in the Medicine Hat Mall / Medicine Hat News FUTURE VISION.

We all have our own visions of the future; and although we can't predict it, we can set the course our futures will take. Welcome to FUTURE VISION. We hope you enjoy meeting the amazing women that are leading us into the future.

If there is a Medicine Hat equivalent for "Steel Magnolia's", then Laurie Sharland would be its personification.

She is a western lady, as gracious as that expression implies. She has a deep respect for tradition coupled with a "Why not?" willingness to try new things, both graced with unquenchable optimism for the future. She has a fierce commitment to her family and her community. And she has enough backbone for an entire regiment, a characteristic that allows her to make decisions and get things done.

That Laurie lives in Medicine Hat is not an accident, it's a deliberate choice. Although she was born in Trail, B.C., her family moved here when she was "around three, I think." Her mother's family homesteaded in the Cypress Hills and Len's (her husband) family ran a general store in town.

"I love our city. I feel connected here," she says, adding, "We stay because we want to. I don't want to live anywhere else."

Her first husband (she was 11) with her future husband was inauspicious. "I told Leonard to go back to his side of the tracks. He didn't belong here!"

Apparently, he didn't do what he was told: they've been married for 44 years. For her part, she is devoted to him.

"He is," she says, "my best friend, my sympathizer, my strength, my lover. He supports me in every aspect of everything I do."

And Laurie does a lot huge chunk of it, on a volunteer basis. When she started volunteering, it was a way to spend time with her kids. She says, "We never SENT our kids to anything we always TOOK them."

As a consequence, she helped organize a youth bowling league to take them to in the winter and a citywide summer swim program for the summer, and she volunteered countless volunteer hours to keep both programs running.

Laurie became a master competitive bowler and the first female master instructor in town, using these skills in both the Seniors, bowling league and the high school bowling program.

She also talked to "my family, my friends everyone I knew to get behind this." (One of Laurie's greatest strengths: she can recruit anyone.)

That first Stampede Queen was crowned in 1971 "on a flat-bed in the old Safeway parking lot downtown." Who was it? "Joy Rose," is the prompt answer, "and Linda Ost was her princess."

This is typical of Laurie and another of her many strengths: she remembers an incredible number of details, names and events. When asked about her volunteering efforts, she will tell you every name of everyone she worked with, on whichever project it was. For Laurie, volunteering is not a solo effort it takes a lot of people to make things work.

"[Medicine Hat] is a great place for volunteers," she says with obvious pride, "When I chaired the volunteer committee for the '92 Seniors Games, we had more volunteers than we needed!" Laurie believes that volunteering makes a community. "It's only as good as you want it to be," she maintains. "If you reap the benefits of living in a community, then you have a duty to give something back."

There are also great rewards, "the joy and excitement of coaching kids, watching them succeed, being there when you're needed in a young life."

And she delights in staying in touch with "her girls" (the Stampede Queen contestants), her swimmers, her bowlers and their parents, watching their kids grow and, now, their grandkids.

"You see all the future." A future that Laurie believes is "in wonderful hands! There are a lot of phenomenal young people here, so many outstanding youngsters. We need to celebrate the positive and zero in on kids who do well."

The Stampede Queen contest has grown over the years, too. There are more opportunities for the contestants, the prizes are bigger, the duties are exceptional. In addition to the demonstration of horsemanship, "there's now a solid week of activities leading up to the crowning. Since the

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almost to the minute. Laurie hasn't wasted time in her life, but if she has a regret it is that there isn't enough time to do everything she would like.

"Many years ago, I might have liked to become a realtor. It was a new field for women," she explains, "but I wanted to give my time to my family and I wouldn't have done as good a job as I could have." She shakes her head in mock regret, "And all of our friends were young and buying houses!" Speaking of friends, Laurie cherishes hers. "I have friends that I've had since grade school. I'm blessed," she says, sincerely. She clearly adores her children and grandchildren, too - "I enjoyed every step my kids took! And with grandkids, it's even better. You're older and you have more patience."

Definitively, she also believes that "there is full of good guys" and remembers that there were people who continued to pay off their debts to her mother-in-law decades after the store was closed. "They honoured their name by honouring their debts. I think that's phenomenal!"

Laurie now organizes tours for a local travel agency, a job she fell into almost accidentally, but which she enjoys immensely. "I try to plan tours as though I were the tourist. I include the highlights and enough down time so that it still feels like a holiday."

She's been on a few over the last 22 years: Las Vegas, Reno, Expo '86, the Seattle World's Fair, Baja and the Maritimes (21 times!).

Although she loves her life as it is, Laurie is constantly looking forward. This is her 29th year for the Stampede Queen contest she'd like to aim for 30. And her list continues: "I'd like to take my husband through the Panama Canal," she says, "I believe in the United Way. I'd like to have enough time to be the Campaign Chair and give 100%. I'd like to volunteer wherever I'm needed. It's spelled N-O."

She stops and smiles, "But I haven't got there yet. There's no time!"

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She also began speaking at sportsmen's banquets about how women could contribute to the development of sports. Laurie wanted to increase the roll of women in existing sports, including sponsorship and active participation.

"There would be a room with 400-500 men, and me, stuck in the middle of a podium full of men."

Over the years she's been involved in nearly every aspect of sports in the city from selling programs and souvenirs for the Tigers to competing in, and then, 1971, Joe Racer (once, on three wheels!).

When in 1971, Cor Fisher, one of the founders of the Medicine Hat Stampede, asked her if she'd organize a Stampede Queen contest. "They'd had one from '56-'60. Then it stopped. I don't know why."

Laurie got involved with the project immediately.

Stampede Queen represents the Stampede Board AND the City, we try to make Laurie aware of what's here," says Laurie. "We've done things like Alta Glass when it was still here, The Great Wall of China and the Saamis Teepee. This year, we've included an in-depth tour of the Museum behind the scenes with Donny White."

Laurie is also the Chair-coordinator of the National Board of Miss Rodeo Canada. She schedules the reigning queen's yearly activities - an awesome task since Miss Rodeo Canada is highly in demand: some days are scheduled



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