

Empire Club Foundation 2023-2024 Annual Report

Overview from the President

The Empire Club Foundation continued to expand its growth in 2023-2024 with its most productive year yet since reactivation in 2020-2021. The Board, through several strategic meetings, has coalesced and is now **operating as a solid team** with specific goals set by each of its various Committees. The Board has a maximum capacity of 13, with twelve of those positions currently filled. In the past year there has been one resignation from the Board and this position was filled quickly maintaining the count at twelve. This new Board member was subsequently appointed by the Board to the position of Corporate Secretary. Since none of the existing Board Members are in a position at this time to eventually take over the role as President, the 13th position on the Board is currently being kept open as we search to identify the future President and bring them onto the Board so that they may have several months of training prior to assuming the role of President for 2025-2026.

One of the challenges faced by the Board is that its members are primarily from an older demographic, and since the Foundation produces materials primarily consumed by a younger demographic, it will be important to bring on some **younger Board members going forward**. This transition began with the recent recruitment of the new Corporate Secretary and will continue going forward.

There have been several significant developments over the past year, starting with the decision to seek special funding to build **a new Empire Club Foundation website with an entirely updated Digital Library**. This funding was obtained early during this past fiscal year thanks to **generous donations from the Jackman Foundation and from the Hal Jackman Foundation**, and this new website will be launched over the summer of 2024. Given that this is the primary and most important product offered by the Foundation, it was important to entirely redesign the existing site, completed well over 20 years ago, so that the important content generated by the Club would be accessible in an efficient, fast and aesthetically pleasing fashion. This new product will contain a Chatbot, a Speech-to-Text function and be easy to research in several ways. The design firm is presently closely engaged with the Foundation's "**Website Committee**" and is seeking to create a product that will be attractive to users of all ages, with a special emphasis on senior high school, college and university students.

Until this new website is in place, the core offering of the Foundation is challenged due to the dated nature of the existing Digital Library. This in no way means that the secondary functions of the Foundation are not already well underway and have met with good success. **The new “Newsletters” being produced, which replaced the “Teacher’s Guides”** produced during the first two years of operations, are being very well received, particularly the March 2024 Newsletter done for International Women’s Day. The challenge here is that the Foundation must find ways to effectively measure the reach of these products by capturing exactly how many people access these products, and how. The **Education Committee** of the Foundation is presently working on this issue which will determine when and how future educational products produced by the Foundation are delivered.

One of the highlights of this past year was a joint event staged by the Foundation in collaboration with the Empire Club, to celebrate the **120th anniversary of the Empire Club’s** continual operation since 1903. This event was held at the Royal York Hotel on November 20th, 2023 and was well attended by the Boards of the Club and Foundation, by numerous Past Presidents, and by friends of the Club interested in its historical reach and legacy. The Foundation received a special donation from the Nona Heaslip Foundation which allowed this event to occur, and it was a moving experience to celebrate this event with one of the Club’s most iconic Past Presidents just months before her passing. Several Past Presidents were invited to tell their story and how they brought some of the most important business, political and social leaders of the day to the Club’s podium.

Presenters included Ian MacDonald, Catherine Charleton, Tony van Straubenzee and Kelly Jackson, and their stories were captured on video and become part of the Digital Library. The Foundation is presently working with **Heritage Toronto to place an historic plaque at the birthplace of the Club** back in 1903. This birthplace is at what is now the 1 King Street West Hotel and Condominiums, and the present owners had their own Board of Directors vote on the placement of such a historical plaque on the outside of their property, a vote that was passed. It is hoped that Heritage Toronto, which is presently working on the text and graphics for this plaque, will have it ready for the summer of 2024.

There are other partnerships being developed by the Foundation, including with the **University of Toronto Library System** and by the **Canadian Principal’s Association**. The purpose of these proposed partnerships is to lend credibility and to shine a spotlight on the unique and extraordinary primary source documents being relaunched this year by the Foundation through its new website. The importance of this has never really been emphasized, and as a result the Digital Library has never really had the distribution and use

that it deserves, something the launch of the new Digital Library this summer will seek to address.

Finally, the Foundation has taken on another new role this past year, namely acting as **the “memory” of the Empire Club of Canada**. Each time a national or international figure who was associated with the past 120 years of Club history passes away, the Foundation researches his or her message to the Club and ties it to the present, thereby allowing readers to remember the important topics of the day that marked the time of that particular speaker. It is both a history lesson and a salute to the important role that those personalities played on the country and the world.

The Empire Club Foundation has an important function to play thanks to the fact that it holds some of the best source historical resources in the country. The thousands and thousands of speeches delivered weekly at the Club’s podium since 1903 have never really been promoted properly and as a result remain poorly known. This will change starting later this year with the new website, and with that will come the realization that students, academics and researchers of all kinds now have a vibrant new source of history to look at, a source that came directly from the mouths of those men and women who made Canada the country it is today.