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## City Departments

### Hall of Fame Members

#### Jill Summerhayes

*Inducted 2006*

Jill Summerhayes moved to Cambridge with her husband Stuart in the fall of 1978 to take up the position of classified advertising manager at the Cambridge Daily Reporter. Ms. Summerhayes was the first female advertising manager in the paper's 150-year history and her appointment was met with some skepticism and not a little resistance. However her competence won over even the most adamant of her critics and she continued at her post until ill health forced her to resign in 1983. She was diagnosed with osteoarthritis, a disease that affected her in nearly all areas of her body.

Still young and unwilling to meekly accept a life restricted by her condition she turned her attention to finding means by which she could cope with and perhaps overcome the limitations imposed by arthritis. Realizing that she would need a cane to assist her mobility she looked at what was available and was more than a little displeased with the plain, utilitarian canes she found. They served their purpose but demonstrated no flair and provided nothing for their owners other than physical support. She began researching the history and availability of interesting and attractive canes. Over the next five or six years she became an acknowledged expert in this hitherto little explored field and conceived the idea of starting a cane business to served those, like herself who wanted attractive canes that they could feel good about. A trip to England in 1983 yielded a contract with Coopers of England who manufactured a wide range of canes and "Cane and Able" was born. Ms. Summerhayes operated the business from her home for 20 years and became a much sought after speaker not only on the history and lore of canes but also as an inspiration to many other disabled people with whom she shared her experiences of overcoming her disability. She soon became known all over the continent as "The Cane Lady" and was a frequent guest on radio and television shows with hosts that included Dini Petty on CTV and Peter Gzowski on CBC's Morningside. In 1987 her business was the subject of a feature article that was published in over 100 newspapers across Canada. As a result disabled people from across the country contacted her about opening "associate" businesses in their parts of the country. In 1993 Ms. Summerhayes was invited to the headquarters of Canada's largest cane distribution company to work with them in introducing a series of fabric-wrapped canes. The result was the launching of the "Jill Summerhayes Collection" a line of fabric-wrapped canes with Ms. Summerhayes' picture on the label.



In addition to her business pursuits Ms. Summerhayes has been long involved in the literary scene in Cambridge. Beginning in 1986 she wrote a series of twelve articles on canes for the Cambridge Reporter and two years later was asked to do a twelve week series of columns of a more general nature. The column expanded well beyond the original twelve articles and continued for thirteen years coming to an end only when the Cambridge Reporter ceased publication in September 2003. Sometime later the Cambridge Times enlisted her to serve as one of the paper's weekly columnists, a position she continues to hold.

In 1991 Ms. Summerhayes founded the Cambridge Writers' Collective to encourage aspiring local writers. She served as the Collective's first president for two years and remained a member of the Collective until 2001. Under her leadership the Collective sponsored an annual writing competition for local writers and published an anthology of the best works submitted for the competition. As a writer Ms. Summerhayes has won awards for her short stories from the Stephen Leacock International Short Storey Competition and the Canadian Authors' Association. In 1993 her autobiographical book describing both her battle with arthritis and the development of her business and called "Supporting Myself in Style, Confessions of the Cane Lady" was published.

In 1986 Ms. Summerhayes accepted the task of organizing the first ever Cambridge Heritage Banquet to assist in the raising of funds for the Community Heritage Fund. She organized the committee and researched and wrote the script for the event. The event was highly successful and set the stage for one of her most difficult challenges. In 1997 she was asked to lead a committee charged with developing an Arts Centre in the city. For the next three years she worked tirelessly to ensure the completion of the project, spearheading the fund raising efforts, liaising with city officials, working with the construction oversight committee and keeping the public informed. As chief fundraiser Ms. Summerhayes was responsible for raising nearly \$500,000 from corporate donations and government grants, the largest sum ever raised by a voluntary organization for a city facility up to that time. The official opening of the Cambridge Arts Centre took place on May 5, 2001 and was a daylong celebration of music, dance, poetry, visual art and pottery. As a recognized leader in the Arts Community Ms. Summerhayes was invited, in 2002, to serve as the Arts and Culture representative on the fledgling Cambridge Community Foundation and the following year served as Cambridge's representative on the first Waterloo Regional Arts Foundation.

Over the years Ms. Summerhayes has received a variety of awards and honours including the Bernice Adams award for

communications in 1987, and the Bernice Adams Trustees" Award for her general contribution to the arts in 1995. In 1994 Ms. Summerhayes became one of the first eight women recognized as "Women of Distinction" by the local YWCA in the inaugural presentation of the awards and in 1996 she became the first Honourary Chairperson of the Women of Distinction awards program. Ms. Summerhayes has served as a trainer of volunteer palliative care volunteers at the Cambridge Memorial Hospital and has served on several committees including the Cambridge Cultural Task Force and the Bernice Adams Awards committee. In 1992 she served as the Honourary Chairperson of the Cambridge United Way campaign and was the recipient of the Canada 125 Medal (1993) and the Queen's Golden Jubilee medal (2002) in recognition of her service to her community.

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50 Dickson Street, PO Box 669, Cambridge, ON, N1R 5W8

Phone: 519.623.1340 | TTY: 519.623.6691

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