

Commitment to community, memory of his father

New UVic role model, Ron Lou-Poy, has quietly helped make Victoria a better place to live

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When Ron Lou-Poy was elected ninth chancellor of the University of Victoria, most people likely thought they were voting for a prominent Victoria lawyer.

What they likely didn't realize is they were also voting for Harry Lou-Poy, Ron's father who died in 1999.

It was Harry who was probably the man most instrumental in Ron's development. It was Harry who drove Ron to Chinese school every day after soccer games. It was Harry who sent him to university.

Harry, whose widow Alice still lives in the city, is remembered with admiration in Victoria and remains very much a part of Ron's life.

"My father used to say to me, 'If you conduct yourself like Harry Lou-Poy, you will do well'," said Jack Lee, a lifelong friend of the Lou-Poy family, and the man who inducted Ron into Kiwanis.

"Ron is very much like his father," said Lee. "What you see in Ron today, is what you would have seen back in time in his father."

Honoured father, a close extended family upbringing, and a long personal tradition of Chinese cultural heritage are all big elements of Ron Lou-Poy.

Installing him as UVic chancellor could be regarded as a vote of confidence for an immigrant son. But the 68-year-old Lou-Poy was born and raised in Victoria, as his father was before him. And what really distinguishes Ron most for those who supported him for chancellor is a commitment to the community.

Besides Kiwanis, Lou-Poy has worked for the United Way, set up Victoria CrimeStoppers, served on the board and as president of the McPherson Foundation. And he worked on a committee at the Royal British Columbia Museum to bring the Genghis Khan exhibit to Victoria.

He has helped the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association of Victoria raise money for affordable housing. He helped raise money to reconstruct the Gate of Harmonious Interest and worked to see the Chinese Cemetery declared a historic site.

Much of his effort has gone with little publicity, but it has earned him notice.

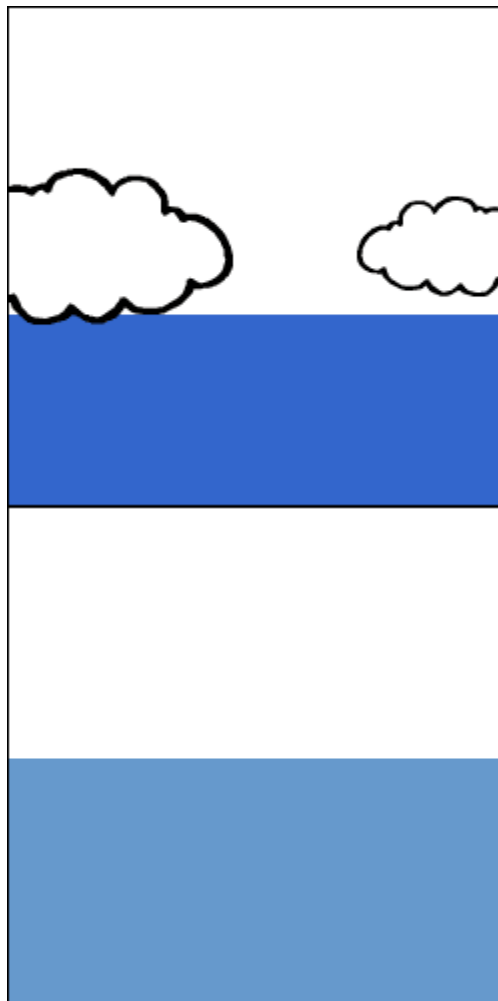


Debra Brash photo, Times Colonist / Ron and May Lou-Poy at home.



Debra Brash photo, Times Colonist / The newly elected chancellor of UVic, Ron Lou-Poy, credits much of his success to the example set by his father. Here, Lou-Poy poses with photographs of his father Harry, including one with other family members and friends.

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"He's going to be a wonderful chancellor," said Norma Mickelson, the outgoing chancellor, who said she was delighted to see Lou-Poy's name put forward.

Lou-Poy was elected to the position of chancellor of UVic last November. The vote is open to just about everybody who has a connection with the university, including alumni, faculty, retired and active, and past and present members of the university senate and board of governors. Lou-Poy will be formally installed in June.

Chancellor is a three-year position and the titular head of the university. It is the chancellor who confers degrees on the graduates at convocation and whose character is assumed to be an inspiration to graduates.

So it's almost ironic that Lou-Poy's father, who came of age during the Depression and was such a huge inspiration in the son's life, never made it past Grade 8.

Back when Lou-Poy was attending Victoria High school a teacher called at the house and asked Harry why his son was taking so many secretarial and clerical courses.

The youth should be taking university entrance courses and aiming for a degree, suggested the teacher.

Harry agreed.

To this day, Lou-Poy still credits that teacher, Lawrie Wallace, for putting him on his path.

He laughs now that he almost had his father convinced he should be allowed to go to Columbia University in New York City.

But on learning the cost, his father decided the son should attend the University of British Columbia.

Ron first took a commerce degree and then went to law school. It was during this time that he met his future wife, May, a Chinese-Canadian pharmacy student from Alert Bay.

Lou-Poy remembers the courtship as one where the couple couldn't escape Chinese family traditions even though they were both born in B.C. Ron borrowed his uncle's station wagon and in accordance with custom visited May's parents, arriving with gifts of food, pork, biscuits and six live chickens.

The first problem arose when one of the chickens escaped when Lou-Poy walked in with them. Fortunately, there was a fence around the house so the bird didn't get far.

The second problem arose when May's parents insisted he take two chickens home with him.

"Boy, did that station wagon stink when I brought it back to Victoria," he said.

That chicken story is part of the element that defines Ron Lou-Poy for Ian Stewart, fellow lawyer and now owner of Honda City and two-time chairman of the UVic board of governors.

For Stewart, one side of Lou-Poy is the story master and joke teller, the person who would enjoy telling a funny anecdote.

Then there is other side, the meticulous, careful, precise individual who is the commercial, real estate and estate lawyer, very much a solicitor as opposed to a trial lawyer.

"We were both in law school together and we graduated in the same class," said Stewart. "We are still good friends, and believe it or not, he is my lawyer."

But Stewart said the humour should not detract from the strength of character shown by Lou-Poy throughout his life.

Stewart remembers Lou-Poy joining a fraternity. While pledging to a fraternity was not unusual in the 1950s, Stewart said it should be remembered this was a time when fraternities were often consciously run on overtly Christian, even racially white lines. To see Lou-Poy join in the face of that atmosphere shows a special strength.

"There were barriers there," said Stewart. "And Ron has always represented to me a bit of a breakthrough."

Stewart and Lou-Poy worked together as young lawyers for the firm Crease and Co., now Crease, Harman and Company, in the years following graduation. Stewart left to pursue his own business goals but Lou-Poy remained to eventually become a full partner.

And shortly after making full partner Lou-Poy broke another barrier. In the mid-1960s he was inducted into the Union Club, one of the first non-white men to be admitted. Later, in the late 1980s, Lou-Poy stopped attending the club after a vote in which the organization refused to drop its barrier to women.

The club has since opened up to women. And, as university chancellor, Lou-Poy said he has been told he can be re-admitted. But he also said he's not over-anxious to join one more organization even if it does come with the UVic job.

His election as chancellor is not the first involvement with UVic for Lou-Poy, one of whose two adult children graduated from the university. He served as a member of the board of governors in 1972-74 and 1992-95. In 2000, he was granted an honorary doctorate of laws.

But throughout the granting of these honors and titles, Harry Lou-Poy was always there. Even before he was elected UVic chancellor, Lou-Poy was introducing his dad to the university.

For example, after Harry's death, Ron learned of an effort to build a day-care centre on campus. The funding was very nearly complete, but Ron came through with a substantial donation that allowed it to go ahead.

It also allowed him the privilege of naming the day care, in honour of the man who always met him after soccer games with a bottle of soda pop waiting in the car. The facility was opened as the Harry Lou-Poy Infant and Toddler Child Care Centre.

"I wanted there to be something with his name on it," said Ron Lou-Poy.

Profile of Ron Lou-Poy.