



## 2024 WOMEN OF THE YEAR RECIPIENTS ANNOUNCED

May 24, 2024 – KITCHENER, ON – [Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest](#) is pleased to announce the 2024 Rogers [Women of the Year](#) award recipients.

A SOLD OUT ceremony was held last night to honour the 12 individuals, chosen by a group of adjudicators from 123 local nominees – the most nominations every received for the almost 50-year-old event. The outstanding community leaders were recognized by friends, family, co-workers and dignitaries with the assistance of Masters of Ceremonies, Robin & PJ from Mornings on Country 106.7. Thanks to [Gowling WLG](#), the event also featured dynamic keynote speakers Martha Breithaupt, Director and Host of [State of Science](#) and Tricia Mumby, Co-founder of Mabel's Labels.

“Congratulations to our 2024 Women of the Year award recipients,” shares Tracy Van Kalsbeek, Executive Director of K-W Oktoberfest. “We know that identifying, celebrating and increasing visibility of women's achievements helps build equality and we are proud to have provided a platform to honour the incredible women in our community since 1975.”

The following leaders were acknowledged for their outstanding contributions to this community:

### [2024 Award Categories](#) and [Recipients](#):

- 1. Arts & Culture** recognizes women for enriching the culture of our community through the creation or promotion of the arts on a volunteer or professional basis. **SPONSOR: [SCOTIABANK](#)**  
**Recipient: Erin Bow** is an internationally known, creative writer with ten published books, including three volumes of poetry and six novels. Her work has been translated into ten languages, and she regularly appears in local venues such as the Watershed Writers radio/podcast program and the Wild Writers Literary Festival. She is active in our community, where she visits schools, judges writing contests and runs programs at both the Kitchener and Waterloo public libraries. Erin is a strong advocate for people who might otherwise be left out, most particularly neurodivergent people and members of the LGBTQ+ community. With Erin Bow, we have a literary rockstar in our midst, one who puts her adopted hometown of Kitchener-Waterloo on the global literary map!
- 2. Community Service** recognizes women for generously volunteering their time to programs and services that make our community a better place. **SPONSOR: [ROGERS TV](#)**  
**Recipient: Uzma Bhutto** embodies hope, resilience and commitment in her 19-year journey of community building and women's empowerment. As a global citizen, she champions marginalized groups, particularly Muslim and racialized women. Uzma's extensive volunteering, board memberships and leadership roles in organizations like the Coalition of Muslim Women, the Sexual Assault Support Centre, KidsAbility and the Rotary Club, all highlight her dedication to mental health, equity and social inclusivity. Her tireless efforts, from grassroots projects like Tea and Tales, leadership training, serving shelters and Give30 food drive, not only showcase her inclusive leadership and advocacy, but also highlight her unparalleled passion for fostering economic empowerment and ensuring financial stability for women.
- 3. Entrepreneur – Under 40 Years Old** recognizes women for initiating and/or administering an enterprise or business. **SPONSOR: [PILLER'S](#)**  
**Recipient: Rebekah Churchyard** is a Registered Social Worker, Project Manager and Psychotherapist specializing in geriatrics and dementia care. She is the CEO and Founder of Green Care Farms Inc., the first nature-based program in Canada for people with dementia on an operational farm. Rebekah also works full-time in Specialized Geriatric Services for Home and Community Care Support Services Waterloo Wellington. Prior to this, she served as President and Vice-President with the Toronto Council on Aging Board of Directors and as an Accountability Table member with the City of Toronto's Seniors Strategy.
- 4. Entrepreneur – 40+ Years Old** recognizes women for initiating and/or administering an enterprise or business. **SPONSOR: [MIRANDA O'SULLIVAN, CHESTNUT PARK WEST](#)**

**Recipient: Dr. Cindy Ward** is a dynamic Kitchener woman and lifelong entrepreneur having started over ten local businesses in K-W, including the original Boathouse in 2004. Cindy earned her PhD later in life, at age 47, and encourages others to always keep learning. Recently she landed a spot on CBC's Dragon's Den for her newest business, Dr. Ward's Fresh Mist, an ecological genius of a company that makes plant-based air fresheners. Cindy is the epitome of the phrase "aim higher," despite the difficulties of life, and at 56 she is a well-loved and respected role model in our community.

5. **Group Achievement** recognizes achievements by a group of women that impact and/or improve our community or society. **SPONSOR:** [FOX FINANCIAL PLANNING](#)

**Recipient: Jill of All Trades** was founded in 2014 at Conestoga College by visionaries, Brenda Gilmore and Rosie Hessian. The initiative first began as a special day for high school women in K-W, along with their educators, to learn about opportunities available to women who were pursuing trades-based education and careers. A decade of growth and expansion has led to the program being trademarked in Canada and the United States. With the support of thousands of volunteers, hundreds of partners, and philanthropic supporters, Jill of All Trades is now delivered throughout Ontario, across Canada and the United States, boasting more than 120 events and empowering future generations of women in skilled trades.

6. **Health & Wellness** recognizes women for promoting and helping others achieve and promote mental, physical or spiritual well-being in their careers or community involvement.  
**SPONSOR:** [GREATER K-W CHAMBER OF COMMERCE PHYSICIAN RECRUITMENT PROGRAM](#)

**Recipient: Neha Juwale's** empathy and compassion, combined with her personal journey, were the drivers for her to create bookmytherapy.ca, a web-based platform facilitating connections between individuals seeking culturally appropriate care with mental health professionals who provide services in their patients' language of choice. Seeking support for her own mental health, Neha discovered that language, cultural non-verbal cues, and unwritten norms were barriers to receiving care and healing. Speaking with others revealed that they too were facing similar challenges. Neha and bookmytherapy.ca strive to provide culturally relevant mental health resources...promoting mental wellness and reducing the stigma surrounding mental health within the community.

7. **Lifetime Achievement** recognizes women for being role models, mentors and/or advocates for positive and social change throughout their lifetime. **SPONSOR:** [SCHLEGEL VILLAGES](#)

**Recipient: Martha George's** multi-decade career is an expression of personal commitment to excellence and passion for empowering others. Becoming the first female Chair of Grand Valley Construction Association's Board, and her progression to President and CEO of GVCA, broadened her influence in the profession. Martha's invaluable contributions are reflected by thousands of successful industry partnerships, construction projects, and community initiatives. A tireless advocate for women in trades and a committed volunteer, her reach surpasses the tangible, positively impacting the wellbeing of tens of thousands of individuals. Martha's perspective indicates that "you're a leader whenever you're making a positive difference, regardless of position or title."

8. **Professional – Under 40 Years Old** recognizes women for dedicating themselves to the pursuit of excellence in their chosen careers. **SPONSOR:** [BERESKIN & PARR](#)

**Recipient: Ashley Schuitema** has committed her career to the unwavering intention of providing support and services to the vulnerable in our community. She was co-counsel on the precedent-setting, encampment case in Waterloo Region, which made a critical impact on the lives of many community members experiencing homelessness. Ashley is also the coordinator of the Sexual Harassment in the Workplace Project, which provides free legal information for the public and advice for persons who have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace. Ashley is a remarkable lawyer that believes it is her responsibility to use her profession and skill set to broadly advocate for systemic change in the community for women, victims of sexual harassment and people experiencing poverty.

9. **Professional – 40+ Years Old** recognizes women for dedicating themselves to the pursuit of excellence in their chosen careers. **SPONSOR:** [HOME HARDWARE](#)

**Recipient: Nenone Donaldson** is the Vice President of Advancement at the University of Waterloo. She brings over two decades of fundraising expertise to her pivotal role. Focused on advancing the university's mission, Nanone leads a dynamic team of over 120 professionals, spearheading comprehensive alumni engagement initiatives. Her strategic leadership fosters enduring partnerships crucial to the university's mission, driving a sustained fundraising strategy aligned with academic priorities. Through her focus on

transformative gifts and collaboration, she empowers her team to exceed expectations. Nenone's dedication ensures Waterloo's continued leadership in education and innovation.

- 10. Skilled Trades** (New in 2024!) recognizes women for exceptional contributions to the advancement and empowerment of women in the trades sector.

**SPONSOR:** [GRAND VALLEY CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION](#)

**Recipient: Brandi Ferenc** is the founder of Fair-Trades Toolbox. She is a licensed 313a Refrigeration Mechanic/Gas Fitter 1 Journeyperson, HVAC instructor and mentor for women in skilled trades and HVAC apprentices. Brandi represents one of less than 50 women working within this trade and holds the honour of being the first female to compete in the Skills Ontario competition within the post-secondary heating systems category. In spite of the barriers she faces working in a male-dominated industry, she chooses to wear a smile to light the way for future generations.

- 11. Science, Technology, Engineering & Math** recognizes women for outstanding advancement to the field of STEM. **SPONSOR:** [PROFOUND IMPACT](#)

**Recipient: Linda Li** is an Environmental Engineer and Associate with Dillon Consulting, an employee-owned, Canadian firm serving the Waterloo community since the 1970s. For seven years, Linda has supported both Canadian and International clients and contributed to complex and multidisciplinary projects in the areas of water, energy and climate change. She continuously strives to foster a culture of collaboration and inclusivity within STEM. Linda's dedication extends beyond her profession; she volunteers with several engineering and water associations, both locally and internationally. Passionate about knowledge sharing, Linda has lectured and participated in panels at the University of Toronto, University of Waterloo and TMU.

- 12. Young Adult (14 to 23)** recognizes women for leading by example and being a role model to their peers.

**SPONSORS:** [CITY NEWS 570](#), [COUNTRY 106.7](#) AND [CHYM 96.7](#)

**Recipient: Kyo Lee** is a grade 11 Korean-Canadian student, writer and philanthropist. She is currently the chair of SVP Teens and is involved in several local youth organizations in the community. As a writer, Kyo is the youngest winner of the CBC Poetry Prize and finalist for the RBC Bronwen Wallace Award for Emerging Writers. Her work has also appeared in the Narrative, Nimrod, Prism, The Forge, This Magazine, and Synergy, among others. Kyo's debut poetry collection "I cut my tongue on a broken country" is forthcoming with Arsenal Pulp Press in 2025.

For those not able to attend the event in person, they will be able to watch the program on Rogers TV – premiering on Thursday, May 30<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 p.m.

Thank you to the many event, silent auction, photography and videography sponsors who made this celebration possible. The Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest Rogers Women of the Year Awards are proudly supported by [Rogers](#), [Rogers TV](#), [CHYM 96.7](#), [Country 106.7](#), [CityNews 570](#) and [Sherwood Events](#).

*Photos of 2024 Women of the Year recipients enclosed.*

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### **About [Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest](#)**

The first Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest was celebrated in 1969 at Concordia Club in Kitchener, organized by a group of dedicated founders. The keg was tapped and history was made. Since then, Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest has developed its own traditions, becoming one of the largest Bavarian Festivals outside of Germany. Tens of thousands of visitors celebrate annually in our Festhallen, at local restaurants and by attending one of our many family and cultural events. More than just biergartens, Kitchener-Waterloo Oktoberfest is committed to supporting the cultural, economic and social vitality of Waterloo Region, bringing millions of dollars in economic benefit to the Region each year. Oktoberfest Cares provides funding for charitable partners and supports Festival initiatives that enrich our community such as the Onkel Hans Food Drive and keep admission costs low or free for favourites including the Women of the Year celebration and family-friendly events like KIDtoberfest, Thanksgiving Day Parade and Christkinderfest. For more information visit [www.oktoberfest.ca](http://www.oktoberfest.ca).

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