



CANADIAN OUTRIGGER HALL OF FAME

Karen Simpson



Summary

CORA Historical Committee research has identified that there are at least 5 individuals who have made Significant and Exemplary Contributions to Eastern Canada outrigger canoeing. Sheila Kuyper, 2021 Canadian Outrigger Hall Of Fame Inductee is one of these individuals. Wendy Rae-Perkins, 2022 Canadian Outrigger Hall Of Fame Inductee is another of these individuals. Nancy Botting, 2023 Canadian Outrigger Hall Of Fame Inductee is another of these individuals. Janet Davis, 2024 Canadian Outrigger Hall Of Fame Inductee is another of these individuals. The other individual who has yet to receive long overdue recognition is **Karen Simpson**. Ongoing CORA Historical Committee research from 2021 through 2025 has provided further background on the evolution of Eastern Canada outrigger canoeing, as well as the history of Wai Nui O Kanaka as the Eastern Canada outrigger canoe club that has been instrumental in the growth of many other Eastern Canada outrigger canoe clubs. Please see the "Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Story" document in the CORA website Cultural Continuity section for further details. [101]

Early Career

Karen has been involved in sport throughout her high school years excelling in competitive tennis and track and field throwing sports, achieving her athletic letter in Wallaceburg-Chatham Kent region. At York University Karen played Varsity Squash. Karen contributed many of her free hours volunteering for the bid to bring the 1996 Olympics to Canada. Summers were spent coaching and fitness testing athletes in a wide variety of sports as part of a scholarship with NSERC. Karen continued her studies at McMaster University where Karen graduated with an Honours Master's Degree in Science and Exercise Physiology. Karen continued at McMaster in the School Of Rehabilitation and graduated with a BSc in physiotherapy. Karen was an Associate Professor in the School of Rehabilitation for 2 terms. Karen acquired her Certification as an Exercise Physiologist and certified with the Acupuncture Foundation of Canada. Karen specializes in manual therapy, exercise prescription and myofascial release techniques. Karen has worked as a Physiotherapist alongside longtime friend and teammate, Nancy Botting at Physical Edge Physiotherapy in Oakville ON since 1996, where her credentials include BHScPT, MSc, CAFCI, CSEP. [111] [112]

Outrigger Canoeing Achievements

Karen has an extensive history of participation in canoe racing. The PaddleStats website shows race results for Karen spanning the 2001 NY 70-Mile General Clinton Marathon Canoe Race (completed 13 times with 1 win) through to the 2025 Chatterjack (with 4th place finish with partner Danny Marquet). Karen has won numerous races in the two-person marathon canoe both sprints and marathon distances with the Michigan Au Sable race of 120 Miles (17 hours plus nonstop) to the Murray River Race in Australia. Karen would consistently finish 1st or 2nd or 3rd in womens canoe singles and in womens canoe doubles with Susan Harris and in mixed canoe doubles with Stan Machacek at the 2002 Melbourne World Masters Games. Karen would consistently finish 1st or 2nd or 3rd in womens canoe singles and in womens canoe doubles at the 2005 Edmonton World Masters Games. Karen has competed in many countries around the world including Hawaii, New Zealand, Australia, Malaysia and the Czech Republic. Karen and her teammates competed in the World Dragon Boat Racing Championship in the Czech Republic in 2009, where the team won seven gold medals in various categories. Also, in 2009 Karen won the Womens Master at the Club Crew World Championships held in Malaysia. Karen has competed with her marathon female partner Liz Loek winning several times the North Bay Mattawa 64 Km Race obtaining the womens category recognition through regular petitioning for a gender class for women. Karen and Liz have partnered frequently to set new benchmarks in womens canoe both in Marathon and Outrigger canoe racing. Karen competes with and against her American friends in the womens C2 Master Division (40yrs+). At the US National Canoe Championships Karen placed 1st in both 2014 and 2015. In 2015 Karen competed in the Adirondack Classic 90-Mile and finished 2nd with her three teammates. [121] [122] [123] [124] [125] [126] [127] [128] [129] [130]

In 2014 Karen won the womens Open in the OC2 division at the Canadian Outrigger Championships held in Gibsons BC. In 2015 Karen also won 1st place in the Unlimited OC6 at the Liberty Challenge Outrigger Canoe race in New York. Karen has competed in the 42-Mile open water crossing Molokai Na Wahine race 5 times with a 1st and 2nd place finish. Many years of coaching contributions by Sheila Kupyier and Karen would provide a foundation for MOCC / Wai Nui to achieve successes at 2003 Molokai Na Wahine, 2004 Blackburn Challenge, 2006 plus several other years at Toronto International Outrigger Challenge (TIOC), in singles / doubles / team crews, 2007 Wai Nui Why Not Regatta, 2010 Queen Liliuokalani, 2012 Cook Islands Vaka Eiva, and many years at the well-known Liberty Challenge until the event was suspended, as well as several 1st place wins in the womens and mixed divisions at the Catalina Crossing Race. [141] [142] [143] [144] [145] [146] [147] [148] [149]

Karen had a 1st place at Norfolk Island Race 2018 with a combined crew of Australian paddlers and Canadian paddlers Nancy Botting, Jen Harris, Lynne Atwill, Alex Floro, Jane Hall. Karen also had a Takapuna NZ 1st place, participated in the Cross Lake Ontario from Niagara On The Lake to Toronto and Mississauga. There was also a 2nd Place at the 2023 Nish Outrigger Challenge in Miami with Mixed partner Danny Marquet, as well as a 2025 Catalina Channel Crossing masters women 1st place. [151]

Pioneering Achievements

It was Karen Simpson and Nancy Botting, who work as physiotherapists in Oakville, who founded Mississauga Outrigger Canoe Club (MOCC) in 1998. [18] Wai Nui had an exhibition OC6 race with one OC6 from Oakville in 1999. [19] By 2001 there were two OC6s and Wai Nui was recruiting locally. For 5-6 years from 1999 onwards, the Wai Nui Why Not outrigger canoe race at the front of the river heading out onto the lake was the only outrigger canoe racing event in Eastern Canada. Providing the technical and cultural significance of the Polynesian canoe to newcomers to outrigger canoeing was challenging. The old method of rigging the canoe with traditional rope was slow but with the progress to the quicker snap latch allowed for a significant improvement for the accessibility for many for the sport. The advent of the unlimited canoe and speed rigging reduced much of the heavy labour and lifting from initial times. Wai Nui and TSCC partnered to put on the Toronto International Outrigger Challenge (TIOC) for the first 3 years. TSCC took over managing the event, although Wai Nui supports the event with canoes and crews. This event has managed to grow to be the largest international outrigger canoeing event in Eastern Canada. Karen has also worked with local race/event organizers to grow the Wallaceburg Baldoon Annual Paddle Event (2025; 2026). [161]

Coach-Builder Achievements

Karen has coached dragon boating and outrigger canoeing and competed internationally in marathon canoe and outrigger canoe racing. Karen also has provided annual coaching at camps in Florida providing training and technical input. Karen has worked on the board of the Ontario Marathon Canoe Kayak Racing Association (OMCKRA) assisting with policy and manual development. Karen has provided technical training input to all levels of athletes from the beginner to the Olympic level. Presently, Karen along with paddling partner and friend Liz Loek provide coaching in an Intro to Outrigger Canoe Program at the Mississauga Canoe Club (MCC) as part of the grassroots development initiated by the canoe club. Karen was involved and supportive in the adaptive paddling program in Outrigger when initially introduced at USCA in the early 2000s with Jan Whitaker. [171] [172] [173] [174]

Exemplary Achievements

The Marion and Bill Chinnick Memorial Award of Excellence was bestowed upon Karen in 2016 which led to her being enshrined as an Inductee into the Wallaceburg Sports Hall of Fame. Having grown up in Wallaceburg where it is hard to travel any great distance without crossing a bridge over the Sydenham River or any one of the numerous creeks, it was natural to gravitate to water-based sports. Karen has competed in all sizes of boats from the one person kayaks, whitewater canoes, marathon canoes, to the OC1/OC2/OC6 boats. The levels of competition have ranged from small weekend river races, to marathon canoe races, Olympic trials and World championships. [191]

The Mississauga Athlete of the Year is a prestigious local sports honor awarded annually by the Mississauga Sports Council to recognize exceptional athletic achievement, sportsmanship, and dedication to sport within the city. Karen has twice been recognized as Mississauga Athlete of the Year, joining such luminaries as Karen Preston (1989), Silken Laumann (1984, 1988, 1992), and Sabir Butt (1994). [196] [197] [198] [199]

References

#	Note	Link
[101]	Greater Toronto Area (GTA) Legacy	https://www.canadianoutrigger.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/The-GTA-Legacy-Latest.pdf
[111]	LinkedIn Bio Karen Simpson	https://www.linkedin.com/in/karen-simpson-baa41937/
[112]	Physical Edge Physio Bio Karen Simpson	https://www.physicaledgephysio.com/karen-full-bio
[121]	2016 Wallaceburg Sports Hall of Fame Karen Simpson	https://www.wallaceburgcourierpress.com/2016/01/29/barfield-headlines-sports-hall-of-fame-dinner
[122]	Paddle Stats Karen Simpson	https://paddlestats.net/paddlers/simpsoka01
[123]	2002 Melbourne World Masters Games Results	https://websites.mygameday.app/assoc_page.cgi?c=0-941-0-0-0&slD=11236
[124]	2005 Edmonton World Masters Games Results	https://www.imga.ch/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/All-canoe-results-2005.pdf
[125]	2007 New Record Set At River Race	https://www.baytoday.ca/local-news/new-record-set-at-river-race-50483
[126]	2010 Toronto International Outrigger Challenge	https://www.tapatalk.com/groups/dragonboatrankingsforum/viewtopic.php?p=95360#p95360
[127]	2013 Olympic inspiration at the Marsh Mash	https://www.simcoe.com/life/olympic-inspiration-at-the-marsh-mash/article_00fc326b-02cc-5152-b130-65aa1fac44d6.html
[128]	2015 Round Robin Training Event	https://files.omckra.com/HUT_2015_02.pdf
[129]	2019 Record Shattered In Mattawa River Canoe Race	https://www.nugget.ca/sports/local-sports/record-shattered-in-mattawa-river-canoe-race
[130]	2022 Winners Clinch 64-Km North Bay-Mattawa Canoe Race In Just Over Six Hours	https://www.nugget.ca/news/winners-clinch-64-km-north-bay-mattawa-canoe-race-in-just-over-six-hours
[141]	2019 Wai Nui Why Not (21st)	https://raceroster.com/events/2019/23003/wai-nui-why-not-2019
[142]	2014 Toronto International Outrigger Challenge (10th)	https://peppergrinders.livejournal.com/35119.html
[143]	2003 Molokai Na Wahine Results	https://www.jerichoutrigger.com/races2003/wahine2003.html
[144]	2004 Blackburn Challenge	https://www.capeannrowingclub.com/s/BlackburnChallenge2004Publish.txt
[145]	2006 Wai Nui O Kanaka Sweeps Toronto Regatta	https://www.insidehalton.com/life/wai-nui-sweeps-at-toronto-regatta/article_3d9b00cb-03d2-5853-8d17-c28e5f729ba8.html
[146]	2007 Wai Nui O Kanaka Regatta Strong Showing	https://www.insidehalton.com/life/strong-showing-for-wai-nui-paddlers-at-home-regatta/article_bee6f1fc-01b3-550f-be80-587d57ed8512.html
[147]	2007 Wai Nui Why Not	https://www.insidehalton.com/community-story/2957532-strong-showing-for-wai-nui-paddlers-at-home-regatta/
[148]	2015 Liberty Challenge Results	https://libertychallenge.org/2015-race-results/
[149]	Taming Lake Ontario In Outrigger Canoes	https://www.mississauga.com/life/paddle-power/article_10129455-22cf-5801-b8f6-fdb82f40300b.html
[151]	2023 Nish Outrigger Challenge	https://paddleguru.com/races/NISHOUTRIGGERCHALLENGE/MIAMI2023/results
[161]	Wallaceburg Baldoon Paddle Event	https://paddlecanada.com/event/wallaceburg-baldoon-paddle-event/
[171]	Ontario Marathon Canoe Kayak Racing Association (OMCKRA)	https://omckra.com/about
[172]	Paddle Stats Liz Loek	https://www.paddlestats.net/paddlers/loekli01
[173]	Outrigger Introduction Program	https://mississaugacanoecub.ca/pages/outrigger
[174]	Jan Whitaker Founded CAO	https://moveunitedsport.org/cape-ability-outrigger-ohana/
[191]	2016 Wallaceburg Sports Hall of Fame Karen Simpson	https://sydenhamcurrent.ca/2016/01/05/wallaceburg-sports-hall-of-fame-2016-inductees/
[196]	Mississauga Athlete of the Year (Twice) Karen Simpson	https://www.mississauga.com/life/paddle-power/article_10129455-22cf-5801-b8f6-fdb82f40300b.html
[197]	1989 Mississauga Athlete of the Year Karen Preston	http://karenpreston.users.50megs.com/Bio.html

[198]	1984 / 1988 / 1992 Mississauga Athlete of the Year Silken Laumann	https://olympic.ca/team-canada/silken-laumann/
[199]	1994 Mississauga Athlete of the Year Sabir Butt	https://squash.ca/hall-of-fame/sabir-butt/