For Immediate Release
February 24, 2017

Canada's Longest Serving Returning Officer Retires

Many Canadians are only directly involved in the electoral process when they head to a polling station to vote for their local councillor, member of provincial legislature or federal parliament. Others have made a career working in politics and some serve democracy by making sure the electoral process is run fairly and transparently. Yet, few in this country have been part of the democratic process with the longevity and dedication of retiring Returning Officer Ray LeBlanc. No one federally, or in any province or territory, has held the position of Returning Officer for as long as LeBlanc. He now holds the unofficial title as Canada's longest serving Returning Officer. Over the past fifty-four years, he has successfully delivered fifteen provincial elections in the electoral district that encompasses Richmond County in Cape Breton Nova Scotia.

Involvement came naturally for Ray LeBlanc. He recalls working alongside his father, Simon who was Returning Officer in the 1960 general election. He and his mother Margaret pitched-in, going over eligible voter lists, picking out prime polling locations, setting up ballot boxes, and doing whatever needed to be done to get ready for election day. He liked it, and after his dad stepped down, he stepped up as "RO" for the 1963 Nova Scotia general election and since then, he has guided local election administration activities in every provincial election in his electoral district.

This week, LeBlanc participated in what was likely his last training session with more than a hundred Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers in downtown Halifax. On Thursday, Chief Electoral Officer Richard Temporale presented LeBlanc with special recognition known as the QSV Award, for his extensive contributions to Elections Nova Scotia's quality, service and value. LeBlanc was surprised to receive the award and a standing ovation from his colleagues. "I was surprised when they asked me to come to the training after retiring. But, they said I might be needed to help," says LeBlanc.

LeBlanc's departure led to one of four Returning Officer vacancies that have been filled recently. Replacement Returning Officers were officially sworn-in Thursday; Dianne Rutherford for Cape Breton-Richmond. Dylan LaVigne for Dartmouth South, Eric Cottreau for Hammonds Plains-Lucasville, and Gail Van Buskirk for Yarmouth.

Because Nova Scotia is the only province left in Canada without a fixed election date, event readiness has become a continual improvement process for the staff at Elections Nova Scotia which swells to about 6,000 once a general election is called. Positions like enumerators, deputy returning officers and poll clerks are quickly hired and trained once the writs of election have been issued.

While LeBlanc's retirement as a Returning Officer is official, ENS staff are betting he will be available on a moment's notice to pitch in and share the invaluable expertise he has acquired over a lifetime of guiding elections in Richmond.

Photos follow:

Photos:

Photo: Chief Electoral Officer Richard Temporale presents a QSV Award to retiring Cape Breton-Richmond Returning Officer Ray LeBlanc for his commitment to Quality, Service and Value.

Photo: One of several training workshops held for Nova Scotia Returning Officers and Assistant Returning Officers this week.

Photo: The QSV Award is presented as formal recognition to individuals who have excelled in their commitment to Quality, Service and Value in support of the goals and values of Elections Nova Scotia.

New Returning Officers: (left to right): Gail Van Buskirk – Yarmouth, Dianne Rutherford - Cape Breton-Richmond, Dylan LaVigne - Dartmouth South, Eric Cottreau - Hammonds Plains-Lucasville.

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