
SHERRY HOBSON

Supervisor of Communications 1974-2005

*Written by Stacey Cann,
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“Each time a woman stands up for herself, she stands up for all women.”
–Maya Angelou.



Sherry Hobson, c 2000

March 8 is [International Women's Day](#). It's a global day to recognize and celebrate women's and girls' social, economic, cultural, and political achievements. It's also a time to raise awareness of the progress made towards achieving gender equality and the work remaining to be done.

It's a reminder that all women, from all ages and walks of life, have a place in every aspect of Canadian society, including in the economic, social and democratic spheres

As a woman, it's important to encourage and support other women. Celebrate successes. Listen to each other. Take care of one another. Provide mentorship. Know when to ask for and be willing to accept help. Work towards breaking down any judgmental, stereotypical barriers. Be a voice for equality. Help the young females in your life grow up to become strong, independent and confident. Seize opportunities that come your way. For those in the 9-1-1 industry, there are several fantastic networks which provide support and mentoring such as 911 Wonder Woman and NENA's Women in 9-1-1 Alliance.



1959 First class of 999 operators, Winnipeg Police

Going back to June 21st, 1959, nine women (8 operators and 1 supervisor) began employment in Winnipeg at the first Centre across North America to operate a 3-digit emergency number for their community.

Now known as 9-1-1, this number originally began as 9-9-9. Why were women hired, and not men? Because it was more economical. At the time, the wages for men were proposed at \$345 a month,

which municipalities were not prepared to pay for. However, wages for women were proposed at \$200 a month. The arrangement (to hire women instead of men) “will not affect the efficient operation of the proposed system”, is what the leaders of the various municipalities were told. And that it did not.



999 Operators, 1965 Winnipeg Police Rupert Street Station

Winnipeg’s humble beginnings saw emergency operators answer about 300 calls a day on switchboard technology that, while good in its day, was comparable to slotting mail in a mailbox. In the 1990’s, technology progressed where the Winnipeg Police Service’s Communications Centre professionals were using a computer-aided dispatch application combined with records management system and computerized telephone software. With that, training demands and the number of employees subsequently increased.

In the coming years, Winnipeggers (and all Canadians) will see the landscape of 9-1-1 change with Next Generation 9-1-1, which will result in improved emergency services by using advanced telecommunications networks. This will allow for the ability for real-time-texting with 9-1-1, and enhanced location and caller details, among other possibilities.

Because of that fateful decision to hire women operators in 1959 Winnipeg, an opportunity was presented which allowed women to make a significant contribution to public safety within the Winnipeg Police Service. Several female operators eventually went on to become long-serving police officers. Others, such as the late Sherry Hobson, moved into leadership roles.

Sherry began her career as a 911 Operator/Call Taker with the Winnipeg Police Service in 1974. In the late 90’s, Sherry became the first female promoted into a management role within the Communications Division, overseeing the operations of the Communications Centre. I had the pleasure of working for Sherry when I was hired in 1999. She was welcoming, genuine, enthusiastic and committed to the staff members of the division.

In 2001 Sherry was involved in administering my final dispatch exam following several weeks of classroom training; quite a stressful time for any trainee. As the end of the exam approached, she said to me “Is there anything else you want to do before we conclude the exam?” I knew what she was talking about. I had made an error on something earlier in the exam but due to the rapid pace of dispatch, had no time to correct it and thought it was too late to go back. I took a moment and fixed it, thinking I had nothing to lose at this point. I found out some time after that had I not made that correction, it would have been an automatic fail and back to the classroom I’d have gone for another week. She didn’t say anything to me about what she had done - she didn’t need to be thanked. She did what she believed to be right, and for the right reasons.

That was the type of leader Sherry was. Supportive. Nurturing. Humble. She didn’t tell me what I did wrong. She gave me a nudge; a chance to identify and correct my own mistake and

not expect anything in return. I am hopeful that as I continue in my profession that at some point I have or will make a positive impact on someone else that they remember throughout their career.

Fast forward for a moment to present day. I am proud to say that we've come a long way since those days and our roles are not defined by gender. We seek diversity and inclusion within the 9-1-1 industry, not division. We hire strong persons seeking a challenging career. Whether it be differences in gender, culture, socio-economic backgrounds, lifestyle, experiences and/or interests, diversity is needed in any occupation. I want to give pause to appreciate the diversity that I am seeing within the 9-1-1 industry as well as the Winnipeg Police Service, and hope to see that expand.

Sometimes making a professional or personal leap may feel that is poor timing or mean extra work and short-term sacrifices. Or perhaps the way it came about may not be the ideal circumstance, but the reality is there is no perfect time to embrace change and career advancement. One thing that is for certain is that the women hired in 1959 embraced an opportunity. They, and people like Sherry, paved the way for many other women that followed to bridge the gender divide, and positively contribute to the diverse workforce of the Winnipeg Police Service.



Stacey Cann is the Manager of Communications. She is currently on secondment to the Next Gen 911 project. Stacey started her career with the Winnipeg Police in 1999 as a call-taker.

Anyone wishing to recognize a police or staff member they feel made sustained and substantial contributions to policing in Winnipeg and its surrounding municipalities during the past 150 years is asked to their name and (if known) a brief description of their accomplishments to the Winnipeg Police Museum.