



Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES – MANITOBA

December 19, 2019

Upholding the Legacy of Joseph Zuken: Roz Usiskin Citizen Activist



Left to Right: Mel Myers, Jim Silver, Roz Usiskin with the Joseph Zuken Award and Paul Moist

In 2017, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives-Manitoba (CCPA-MB) assumed responsibility for the Joseph Zuken Citizen Activist Award, which was established in 1987.

Joe Zuken was a legend in Winnipeg's North End. He was a lawyer and politician. He served for 42 consecutive years as a School Trustee and Winnipeg City Councillor. His was a voice for the poor and the working class.

He represented many citizens stripped of their civil liberties and interned without trial by the War Measures Act during the Second World War. He lobbied for welfare rights and provided legal services for free

for many who could not afford to pay.

He lobbied successfully as a School Trustee for free text books for all children and for the creation of Kindergarten. He was instrumental in the establishment of the Seven Oaks General Hospital to serve the citizens of the North End.

Upon his death in 1986 a group of citizens came together to establish the Joseph Zuken Memorial Association and the Zuken Trust Fund, which over the years has supported a wide array of community endeavors including Rossbrook House and Neechi Foods to name but two organizations. The fund is now managed by the Winnipeg Foundation.

there is an alternative.

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The Association established the Joseph Zuken Citizen Activist Award to be presented to individuals or groups that have made contributions to the community and the city, particularly in the areas of education, social justice policy and law, municipal government, the arts and the Yiddish language.

Past winners have included Dorothy Betz, Carl Ridd, Mount Carmel Clinic and Olga Foltz.

On December 11th, 2019 at the annual State of the Inner City Report meeting, the Joe Zuken Citizen Activist Award was presented to a lifelong North End activist, Roz Usiskin.

Roz has been a lifelong resident of the North End. She graduated from the Yiddish parochial secular school, the IL Peretz Folk School and from St. John's High School, known for its progressive approaches to education. These institutions had major influences on her formative years. At the IL Peretz Folk School, she developed her love for the Yiddish language, the literature and history of the Jewish people. She has for decades been an activist on human rights, peace and social justice.

Roz has served as President of the United Jewish People's Order and as Executive Director of the Manitoba Multicultural Resource Centre. She has also served as the President of the Jewish Heritage Centre of Canada. Roz was a founding member of the Joseph Zuken Memorial Association.

She has authored numerous articles and two books on Jewish Radicalism in Winnipeg. Roz has used her scholarship to preserve the Yiddish language and culture including publishing a book based on Yiddish letters from her own family.

She was a Gold Medal student in Sociology at the University of Winnipeg. Her Master's Thesis on Jewish radicalism in Winnipeg between 1905 – 1920 has become a classic resource base for anyone interested in our city's secular left Jewish community.

Roz's lifetime of activism has been devoted

to preservation of the rich working class culture of the North End of Winnipeg.

She spoke with humility and passion in receiving the Citizen Activist Award. Below are some of her remarks.

Joe Zuken was instrumental in the founding of the United Jewish People's Order, a secular, socialist, national organization that embodied his ideals, his values of working with others to create a more just, humane society in Canada. Today, as we face a dangerous, toxic political climate, with many political leaders found wanting, less than honest, less trustworthy, we look to Joe Zuken as the example, as the model of what a political leader ought to be. His integrity, his moral courage, his wisdom and leadership should be our guideposts. Joe Zuken remains as our moral compass.

CCPA-Manitoba is proud to be associated with the legacy of Joe Zuken and the progressive ideals and social justice principles that he stood for.

Paul Moist is a board member and Research Associate with the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Manitoba.

References available upon request.

