



Celebrating Mothers this Month!

May is one of my favourite months because we get to celebrate mothers everywhere. For me, it's also a time to double down on celebrating the most extraordinary woman in my life: my mom.

This month, we celebrated her 85th birthday and Mother's Day, two occasions that gave me the perfect excuse to shower her with love, admiration, and thanks. But truthfully, no single day—or even two—is ever enough to capture what she means to me and my three sisters.

My mom embodies love, caring and generosity. These aren't just words that sound nice in a greeting card; they are the quiet, steady values she lives by every day. She raised her daughters not just to be kind, but to be grateful—an important distinction. Through her actions and her wisdom, she taught us that appreciation is powerful, and that if we're lucky enough to live in this world, we should do our part to make it better.

These actions aren't loud or flashy. They show up in the details: in the way she lovingly washes and irons every single sheet before

ELLE-vation Nomination Deadline
20 June 2025
Three winners will get a FREE Ticket to the Screening of Sandra's film, *Out Standing*, at the NAC!

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a retreat. It's no small task, but she does it with care—because she knows that comfort matters. She also bakes a little treat for every Lifeshop



tribe, something sweet to offer up as a quiet gesture of “someone is thinking of you”. Most often, it's her famous *sucre à la crème*, a melt-in-your-mouth piece of Quebecois magic.

These acts of service are not grand gestures, but they are deeply meaningful. They are her way of gently shaping the world into a softer, kinder place—one ironed sheet, **one bite of *sucre à la crème* at a time.**

Sandra



Welcome to Our Newest Tribe!

They came together and discovered that what they had most in common was...a kind heart.

Welcome to the new tribe, from PEI to Burlington!



A Courageous Step Forward: Minister of Veterans Affairs Jill McKnight

No matter your political affiliation, you have to admit that it takes courage to step into the world of politics without prior experience. Jill McKnight, the newly appointed Minister of Veterans Affairs, has done just that with admirable grace and strength. Her appointment may have surprised some, but after meeting her, it's clear she's exactly where she needs to be.

Our recent conversation was sincere and deeply authentic. Minister McKnight is warm, grounded, and attentive—qualities that aren't taught but are vital in this role. She brings a natural ability to listen and an eagerness to understand the complex needs of veterans across the country.

What's most impressive is that she is already “all in.” She listens with her heart, and her commitment is evident.

Veterans deserve leaders who see them, hear them, and advocate fiercely on their behalf. ***Jill McKnight is no stranger to courage — and that bodes well for the road ahead.***





Out Standing – The Movie!

Drumroll please...

Mark your calendars! Save the date! **Out Standing** is coming to a screen near you!

The Ottawa screening of **Out Standing** will be held at the National Arts Centre on Thursday, September 25th, 2025.

Information regarding sponsorship opportunities and ticket sales will be available in the next couple of weeks.

Esprit de Corps' Top 20 Women in Defence

Esprit de Corps magazine has once again honoured trailblazing women in Canada's defence sector with its 2025 Top 20 Women in Defence list. Two members of the Pepper Pod community are joining the list this year!

Cathy Priestman

Among the distinguished honorees, our very own Cathy Priestman, Director of Operations (as if I need to introduce her!) stood out for her exceptional contributions to paving the way for women in the military.

Cathy's accomplishments are so numerous that we can't mention them all. From being the first woman at RRCM to hold the position of Cadet Wing Training Officer, to receiving the Commander's Commendation for her service on the Multi-National Force and Observers in Sinai, Egypt, to serving as the Governor General's Logistics Officer on several state visits throughout Africa, Cathy served with passion and pride throughout her career in the Royal Canadian Air Force.

Upon leaving the military, she incorporated her own company and became one of the most respected women business mentors in the region, with multiple awards lining bookshelves in her home.

Today, she plays a crucial role in all our programs at the Pepper Pod. If there were a special award category for "Super Women Uplifters," she'd lead the pack and probably have a following of thousands! She's also Gunther's favourite step-mommy.

Michelle Douglas

If you've been in Michelle Douglas's presence, you will have felt her grace, her strength of convictions, and her inner peace! She is nothing less than a modern-day hero.

Michelle's journey from a Canadian Armed Forces officer to a leading human rights advocate epitomizes resilience and courage. In 1989, she was honourably discharged from the military due to her sexual orientation, despite an exemplary service record. Undeterred, Michelle launched a landmark legal challenge against the Department of National Defence, culminating in 1992 with the abolition of discriminatory policies against LGBTQ+ service members. Michelle paved the way for so many other men and women to serve.

Following this pivotal legal victory, Michelle became the first Executive Director of the LGBT Purge Fund, a position she still holds today. She is also spearheading the creation of the 2SLGBTQI+ National Monument in Ottawa. It is being built to commemorate and honour the historical discrimination faced by 2SLGBTQI+ people in Canada, particularly during the LGBT Purge.

We are tremendously proud that she is also a member of the Pepper Pod community and a Lifeshop grad. Congratulations, Michelle!





Nominations Closing Soon – 2025 ELLE-variation Awards

Celebrating women who champion other women!

NOMINATION DEADLINE = 20 June 2025

Celebrate sisters, empower souls, raise spirits, and champion amazing women. The Pepper Pod ELLE-variation Awards were created to recognize women from the military and veteran community who lift up other women. Nominations for the 2025 ELLE-variation Awards are open until June.

Nominate women who made a difference in your life and the lives of others: Women who lift you up, women who advocate, support, comfort and celebrate other women. Women champions can be found at all ranks, all positions, and all levels... who is your champion?

This program was made possible by YOU – fabulous women who support each other – by generous assistance from Veterans Affairs Canada and by other kind donors. **ELLE-variation Award Winners from across the country will gather in Ottawa and will get FREE tickets for the screening of Out Standing!**

Nominate her today: <https://pepperpod.ca/strong-women/elle-variation/>



Veterans Affairs Canada

Anciens Combattants Canada

Springing into Action: CONNECT-HERS Bloom with Purpose



Along with the fresh breeze of spring, the spirit of renewal was in full bloom at the Pepper Pod, where **CONNECT-HERS** Program Director, Jo Bilodeau hosted two information sessions for soon-to-be CONNECT-HERS

Part of the Veterans Homelessness Program, CONNECT-HERS is a women veteran’s peer volunteer initiative designed to support women veterans facing or at risk of homelessness. But more than that, it’s about planting the seeds of **connection, compassion, and community** — and watching them grow.

The recent information sessions brought together groups of women veterans with lived experience, big hearts, and a shared determination to uplift others. Attendees learned about Canada’s housing crisis, the government’s action plan, program components, the commitment required and how CONNECT-HERS will provide peer support and connection. *The questions were thoughtful. The energy? Unstoppable.*



Transformative Workshop (en français)

Thank you to everyone who registered for this upcoming workshop with Marcellin Perron. By now, you should have received an email confirming your seat.

Enjoy your fabulous day!

- Date:** 7 June
- Time:** 9:00 – 15:00
- Language:** French
- Includes:** lunch and snacks
- Cost:** \$25 (e-transfer to info@PepperPod.ca)

Three ELLE-variation Award winners will get a FREE ticket to the Ottawa screening of Sandra’s film, *Out Standing*, at the National Arts Centre!





SUP Ladies?!? Paddleboarding Day

SUP Ladies!?!

- 8 June 2025
- 8:30 am
- Meech Lake (P12)
- BYOB – Bring Your Own Board 😊

Kayaks are welcome too!

If you are bringing a guest, please ensure that she is 18+ years old.

Remember to bring your boards (washed before entering a new lake), towels and life jackets (obligatory).

SCHEDULE

8:30 am	Meet at Meech Lake P12 - arrive early as parking is limited at P12 and it is the only place you can unload your paddleboard.
9:00 am to 11:00 am	Paddle, chat, laugh and follow Bibi's map 😊
11:30 am	Return to the Pepper Pod and join National Pepper Pod Picnic Day!

Register here: <https://pepperpod.ca/event-calendar/sup-ladies-paddleboarding/>



SUP Paddleboarding Day

Registration
Deadline
1 June 2025



Pepper Pod Picnic Day
Registration
Deadline
1 June 2025



National Pepper Pod Picnic Day

Woo hoo! The Pepper Pod team invites everybody in the Ottawa/Gatineau area to join together:

- ➔ Sunday, June 8th, 2025
- ➔ 11:00 am
- ➔ at the Pepper Pod

Thanks to our fabulous sponsor, Versatil Inc., the picnic is free to attend.

Haven't done a Lifeshop™ yet? No problem, the Ottawa/Gatineau gathering is for everyone!

We'll supply the food, so please register to help us plan the menu. <https://pepperpod.ca/event-calendar/national-pepper-pod-picnic-day-open/>



**The photo
that started
it all.**



Sisters in "ARMS!"

The rivalry between the Pepper Pod Paddlers and the WIDS Water Warriors is real. We can love our sisters in "ARMS" and still want them to finish in our wake. Our tents are beside each other for the Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival, but once we hit the water, it's game time!

The rivalry grew even stronger at CANSEC 2024 when the captains of the two teams posed for a photo showcasing their pipes, and the pressure stayed constant for the entire year! Julia Scouten and Cathy Priestman have been exchanging workout texts back and forth for over a year. Keep your eyes on the Pepper Pod social media for a collection of the photos.

**See you on the water in June!
Long live strong women!**



Sunday morning workout...
I'm coming for you



**The Pepper Pod Dragon Boat
team also hit the gym at
Bellefleur Fitness!**





The Pepper Pod Out & About!

Let's see photos of your
tribes Out & About!

Email your pictures to
Cathy@PepperPod.ca



Eva Martinez and Karen Breeck played pivotal roles during the *Esprit de Corps* magazine 2025 Top 20 Women in Defence awards ceremony.



Morning hike
Distance 2.3 km Elev Gain 41 m Time 49m 16s

Andrea Feist and Juls McCarthy from "My Tribe" out for a hike.



A few of the Pepper Pod Paddlers volunteered to paddle for the Steering Clinic held at the Rideau Canoe Centre.



Members from "My Tribe" gathered for some smiles.



Members of the University of Ottawa GeeGees Varsity Rowing Team helped with some spring cleaning at the Pepper Pod.



Women spouses of the RCAF Association, Ontario Group, visited the Pepper Pod.

Upcoming at the Pepper Pod and Beyond

1 June	Registration deadline - Picnic at the Pepper Pod (Ottawa/Gatineau area)
1 June	Registration deadline – SUP Ladies?!? Paddleboarding
1 June	Lifeshop (Vancouver Island - English) on Vancouver Island
3 June	Dragon Boat Practice
5 June	Dragon Boat Practice
7 June	Transformational Day with Marcellin @ The Pepper Pod (en francais)
8 June	Gunther's Birthday!
8 June	SUP Ladies Paddleboarding Morning @ Meech Lake
8 June	National Pepper Pod Picnic Day @ The Pepper Pod and across the country!
10 June	Dragon Boat Practice
12 June	Dragon Boat Practice
17 June	Dragon Boat Practice
19 June	Dragon Boat Practice
20 June	Nominations close for 2025 ELLE-vation Award
20-22 June	Ottawa Dragon Boat Festival
July	Enjoy your summer!

If you'd like to learn more about the Pepper Pod, visit our website at www.PepperPod.ca

Pepper Pod Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/pepperpod.ca>

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Long live strong women!

Can't join us?

Why not donate to support our mission?

DONATE HERE

We need your help to maintain this centre and to keep developing our programs. We want to grow intelligently, diversify our services, and keep the retreat centre beautiful.

LE/THE
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