

PROFILE OF MELVIN N. ZAJAC

The Mel Jr. & Marty Zajac Foundation



Mel Zajac was born in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He lost his father when he was six. At age 11, he was delivering newspapers and from ages 13 - 16, he worked in a local bowling alley to supplement the family income. As there was no welfare or any form of assistance at that time, the whole family was sent to work.

The very words “charity” and “humanitarian” fit Mel Zajac like a perfect glove

Mel Zajac has been a resident of Vancouver, British Columbia since 1949, upon arriving from Winnipeg, Manitoba where he was raised. In 1958 he constructed one of the city’s first hi-rise apartments in the West End of Vancouver. He continued constructing approximately 22 additional buildings which eventually led to the construction of the Pacific Palisades Apartments, the Office Complex, and the Pacific Palisades Hotel from 1966 to 1969. The Pacific Palisades Hotel was “home” to the movie industry and became known as “Hollywood of the North”, coined by the late famous columnist, Jack Wasserman, because it hosted such celebrities as Bob Hope (who was a close personal friend of Mel’s), Katherine Hepburn, Vincent Price, Don Ameche, Leslie Nielsen, Kirk Douglas and Tom Selleck, to mention just a few. Mel continued as President of the Pacific Palisades Hotel until 1989.

Mel’s entrepreneurial successes grace Vancouver’s skylines and have enhanced its suburbs in the forms of houses, apartments, office buildings, and hotels that he helped to develop and build during his career-oriented life. Although to acknowledge his contributions in shaping the physical structure of our city merely obligatory – Mel’s true greatness comes from within.

Mel’s volunteer and community involvement began shortly after his first real estate development, when he began hiring teenagers who were involved with minor crimes and in the court system.

Humanitarian and altruistic generosity towards others is a large part of Mel’s life, and is what Mel himself sees as his greatest role. His many philanthropic endeavours and selfless and charitable acts owe their inception and continuity - their very endurance – to the man and his family who created them.

Mel’s resolve to give back to the community he loves has long been evidenced through his annual charity golf tournament – conceived in 1964 and now the longest running such

charitable event in British Columbia. Until 1987 the major recipient of the fund raising event was the Variety Club.

Mel is not only well respected in the business sector, but his contributions to various charities and community programs have earned him several prestigious awards. Examples of Mel's philanthropy include:

- ◆ Between 1970 and 1980, built a bike track for blind children at Central park, donated a lift bus to transport children to and from Vancouver General Hospital, donated a portable kidney machine to the BC Kidney Foundation, allowing children with kidney disease to attend summer camp, as well as, established wall and elevator murals to brighten Children's Hospital.
- ◆ Big Brother for two years in 1978.
- ◆ Served as a Director of the Variety Club, and remains a member since 1980.
- ◆ A generous contributor to the CKNW Orphans' Fund.
- ◆ In 1984, replaced canoe and camping equipment that was stolen for a children's camping trip, valued at \$4500.
- ◆ In 1986, received the Outstanding Contribution Towards Professional Golf Award in BC, as well as the Patron of the Year award from the Canadian Professional Golf Association in 1987.
- ◆ Recipient of the prestigious Variety Heart Award as Humanitarian of the Year, in 1986.
- ◆ Sponsored a local Pee Wee hockey team for three years in 1988.
- ◆ Sponsored Olympic athletes for the National Swim Team since 1985.
- ◆ Sponsored scholarships to Arizona State University every year since 1987.

Following the untimely deaths of Mel's two sons, in separate sporting accidents, Mel formed The Mel Jr. & Marty Zajac Foundation in 1987. The Foundation has contributed greatly to the community.

In 1992 The Zajac Foundation, under the direction of Mel Zajac, formed a partnership with the Vancouver Neurological Foundation to develop and open a facility in East Vancouver for children and adults with neurological disorders. The BC Centre for Ability was a \$4 million project. In honour of Mel's involvement and generosity, in 1999 he was awarded an honorary lifetime membership.

Other achievements and awards of Mel and the Foundation include:

- ◆ In 1989, donated technological equipment to the BC Bone Marrow Registry to aid in the fight against Leukemia.
- ◆ In 1992, in recognition of his dedication to charitable causes, Mel was awarded the commemorative medal for the 125th anniversary of the confederation of Canada from the Government of Canada, for significant contribution to compatriots, community, and to Canada.

- ◆ After many years as a contributor, in 1994 Mel was honoured as recipient of the year at the Annual Path Finders Dinner.
- ◆ In 1995, the Zajac Foundation donated to the development of the VanCity Place for Youth in downtown Vancouver where street youth can make a fresh start through the development of skills, confidence and self-reliance.
- ◆ In 2001, The Zajac Foundation received an award in association with the International Year of the Volunteer.
- ◆ In 2005 Mel was presented the Leadership Award for Ethical Service to the Community by the Institute for Ethical Leadership in recognition of his courage and vision to act in service to the community to enhance the quality of present and future life by fostering greater understanding between children and seniors.
- ◆ In 2005 Mel was presented a Special Accomplishment Award from the District of Mission in recognition of his exemplary Community Service.
- ◆ The Annual Zajac Men's Golf Classic has raised funds for local charities, non-profit groups, The Zajac Foundation and the Zajac Ranch for Children.
- ◆ From 2006 to 2008, the Annual Zajac Women's Golf Tournament raised funds for the endeavors of The Zajac Foundation; Norgate House and Zajac Ranch for Children.
- ◆ In 2007, Mel was appointed to The Order of Canada for his years of philanthropic work.
- ◆ Served on the Board of Directors for CORCAN (Correctional Services Canada) for several years.
- ◆ Mel has been awarded both the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal and the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal.
- ◆ In 2013, Mel was the recipient of the Rotary International Paul Harris Fellow Award.
- ◆ In 2015, Mel received the Order of BC award.
- ◆ In 2017, Mel received a Lifetime Achievement Award from The Visioneers International Network.
- ◆ In 2018, Mel was awarded the Freeman of the City medal by the District of Mission.

In 1997 The Zajac Foundation partnered with another not-for-profit and developed Zajac Norgate House a 36 unit building specifically designed for seniors and those with disabilities. The project was completed in 1999 and is described as providing "an independent lifestyle for today's seniors", the Zajac Norgate House is a fully wheelchair-accessible, four storied apartment complex with easy access to elevators, underground parking, security, and open living spaces, all in close proximity to shopping and transit services. This is a unique and innovative project in that it is built for residents to "age in place". Every room is adaptable and should a resident lose mobility and require the use of a wheel chair the apartments can be easily changed to adapt to their needs. Zajac Norgate House in North Vancouver is an outstanding example of ideals and hopes becoming reality.

Mel's present project the Zajac Ranch for Children is his most ambitious project yet. Mel's drive, determination and devotion to his dream of creating a camp for children who otherwise would never have the opportunity to go to camp has become a reality.

Set on the shores of Stave Lake “minutes from greater Vancouver and miles away from the ordinary”, this 40 acre Ranch is a unique camp and one of a kind in Canada as it offers a perfect venue for children and youth with serious and chronic illnesses and disabilities, who would otherwise not have the opportunity to experience a summer camp and interact with others facing similar challenges. The Zajac Ranch opened its doors in June of 2004 and welcomed over 350 special needs children. Funded by *The Fisher Foundation* the on-site “OK Corral” Medical Centre operates 24 hours a day during medical camps and staffed by a team of volunteer doctors and nurses from across the country. The Medical Centre offers daily medication and treatments, including dialysis, to the children who attend camp each summer.

The Zajac Ranch for Children has undergone quite a bit of change since first opening in 2004. Since opening its doors, the Ranch has welcomed thousands of children and numerous volunteer doctors and nurses. These children are able to receive medical treatments in our fully furnished, state-of-the-art Medical Centre.

Mel has devoted all his time and energy to making this the best camp in Canada. This is a heartfelt and passionate project and Mel is dedicated to giving all children with serious and chronic illnesses and disabilities the full camp experience. He takes pride in creating the first camp in Canada to open its doors to all volunteer and health organizations for children.

Mel’s courage, integrity and commitment to giving continues to better our communities. He is a visionary and one that never ceases to empower humanitarian causes especially those involving children. In 2015 Mel was recognized again when he was appointed to The Order of BC.

Mel’s philanthropic and humanitarian work has continued for decades, but what ultimately reinforced his commitment was the loss of his two sons. The Mel Jr. & Marty Zajac Foundation is an ongoing, unforgettable and living memory in honour of his sons. Daughters Corinne, Carmen, President of the Zajac Foundation and Karen are his biggest supporters and dedicated to ensuring the perpetuity of the Foundation.

An energetic and busy man; always with visions and goals that are put into action to help others, Mel Zajac is a truly great man in all aspects of the word. Melvin Nicholas Zajac is a man of distinction. It is the Mel Zajacs of this world that make Canada a remarkable and special place to live.

In his leisure time he is found playing golf and is a member of the Capilano Golf & Country Club.