

MEMBER PROFILE



Gail Stephens, FCPA, FCGA Interim President & Chief Executive Officer Canadian Museum for Human Rights

Gail Stephens, FCGA has built a career that intertwines with the very pulse and inner workings of Winnipeg. While she is presently filling the role of Interim President and CEO of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, the ascent of her career put her in a position to be present when the idea for the museum first came to the city in the early millennium.

"I had been in the role of Chief Administrative Officer for the City of Winnipeg for nine months when Glen Murray became mayor," recalls Gail. "It was then that Izzy Asper came to City Hall with this idea for a new museum that he was so passionate about. After hearing his vision, we knew this idea could be a complete game changer for Winnipeg."

Just like the museum, Gail's professional career as an accountant was sparked by inspiration for change.

"When my kids were young, we lived in Snow Lake, Manitoba. I was a teacher for students in kindergarten through sixth grade," Gail explains. "I read an article about how accounting was the up-and-coming professional field for women. After some investigating, I decided to make a career change and pursue an accounting designation. It took a lot of time and hard work, but if it wasn't for my designation I wouldn't have been able to build this career."

Gail achieved her designation in 1990 and graduated from the CGA program as a Gold Medal Recipient. After graduation, she found work managing tax returns and accounting for a variety of small businesses. She later accepted a position with Canadian Tire as a Controller, and then went on to work with the Province of Manitoba.

"Mayor Susan Thompson offered me the role of Auditor for the City of Winnipeg. I accepted, and held that position for about 15 months," Gail says. "At that time, the Board of Commissioners were having disagreements and City Council was about to undergo a restructure. A few of the councilors encouraged me to put my name in for Chief Administrative Officer. I was a little leery about doing that, but I decided to go for it. The rest is history."

When Gail landed the role as the first CAO for the City of Winnipeg, she also became the first woman to run a major Canadian city. "It's been an incredible journey. We created an amazing team that did some great things for Winnipeg," Gail says. "We were involved in the downtown arena, the Provencher Bridge, the expansion of the Winnipeg Library and the development of Waterfront Drive."

MEMBER PROFILE

After five years as CAO, she went on to serve as Chief Executive Officer for the BC Pension Corporation, earned a role as Vice-President of Finance and Services at the University of Calgary and then became Victoria's City Manager in 2009. However, an opportunity in Winnipeg knocked once more, as a familiar vision was becoming a reality. "And so here I am today, back again," Gail laughs. "It's been so wonderful to come back to Winnipeg and see the projects I had been involved in flourishing. Being a part of the museum is the opportunity of a lifetime."



In her current role at the CMHR, Gail oversees museum operations in areas that include visitor services and strategic partnerships, among several others. "A strong financial plan is so important. We are very careful with the funds we use and every dollar is spent with the visitor in mind," explains Gail. "The biggest challenge we face as an organization has really been creating something from scratch. There are so many unknowns when you get started."

Along with having to adjust staffing accordingly, the CMHR comes with many functioning parts. From implementing systems that sell memberships and designing student programs, to opening a boutique and creating an upscale restaurant, the museum is a layered structure. "A building of this complexity comes with significant challenges. Even simple things like factoring in window cleaning for this building are important to the budget."

Gail credits the profession for forming a strong foundation of skills and strategies she's drawn from throughout her career.

"For all of my roles, I've certainly needed my designation to do my job," she explains. "It laid the groundwork for me to excel in applying financial accountability and financial sustainability strategically. I feel extremely fortunate, as I've never had a job I didn't love."

She also recognizes the value of designated accounting professionals across the board.

"Our profession is one that has the potential get really complicated and require real expertise. People who have a solid background in accounting, finance and forecasting will always be in demand," Gail says. "Companies will always want highly qualified people, and that's what designated accounting professionals are."

Learn more about Gail and the Canadian Museum for Human Rights by [visiting their website](#).