

The Honourable Darrell Dexter, ECNS, KC
Liverpool

Darrell Dexter has devoted his life to public service, transforming Nova Scotia through visionary leadership and enduring contributions. As the province's first NDP Premier, he guided Nova Scotia through a global financial crisis with stability and foresight — balancing budgets, reducing small business taxes, raising the minimum wage, and launching the landmark “Ships Start Here” campaign, which created thousands of jobs and which has helped to revitalize Nova Scotia's industrial base. He championed equity and inclusion, introducing Collaborative Emergency Centres, expanding youth dental care and mental health access, and recommending the granting of a posthumous pardon to Viola Desmond.

Dexter's dedication to public service began long before elected office. Newly admitted to the Bar, he combined his legal expertise with a deep sense of civic responsibility, offering *pro bono* services that enabled community-led change. He supported organizations such as the Highfield Park Housing Cooperative, Harbour City Credit Union, and the Victorian Order of Nurses, reflecting his belief that law should serve the public good. His legal training informed his approach to governance—calm, strategic, and principled—earning respect across political lines.

Dexter's impact began in municipal politics, where he revitalized Downtown Dartmouth, spearheaded a 25-year waterfront development plan, and helped establish Alderney Landing as a cultural hub. His early service included work with housing cooperatives, credit unions, and health organizations, reflecting his lifelong commitment to community. In his post-political career, he continues to mentor leaders, advance democratic integrity abroad, and contribute to national discussions on climate and healthcare.

Respected for his authentic, resilient leadership and unwavering integrity, Mr. Dexter fostered partnerships with Indigenous communities, championing Reconciliation and inclusive economic development. His efforts strengthened Nova Scotia's social, cultural, and economic foundations, leaving a legacy of empathy and collaboration.

John George (Jack) Flemming, CM
Halifax

For more than four decades, Jack Flemming has demonstrated exceptional leadership, civic responsibility, and philanthropic commitment, profoundly shaping the social and economic fabric of Nova Scotia. As the founder of Ocean Contractors Limited, Mr. Flemming established a cornerstone enterprise that generated significant employment opportunities and contributed to the province's infrastructure development. His professional achievements, however, are surpassed by his enduring dedication to community advancement.

Mr. Flemming's contributions have been transformative. As Chair of the Capital Campaign for Hospice Halifax, he led the successful effort to establish Atlantic Canada's first dedicated hospice facility, ensuring compassionate care for individuals and families at life's most critical juncture. His longstanding involvement with Bonny Lea Farm, spanning more than three decades, has empowered persons with intellectual disabilities to live with dignity, purpose, and inclusion. Through the Flemming Charitable Foundation, he and his family have provided sustained support to numerous organizations, including Hope Cottage, Feed Nova Scotia, Phoenix Youth Programs, and the IWK Health Centre, reflecting a deep and abiding commitment to the most vulnerable members of society.

In addition to his philanthropic endeavors, Mr. Flemming has rendered distinguished service on numerous boards and professional associations, including Mount Saint Vincent University, the Maritime Heart Centre, and the Association of Professional Engineers of Nova Scotia. His contributions to healthcare, education, and social services have left an indelible mark on the province.

Jack Flemming exemplifies the values of integrity, compassion, and service that define Nova Scotia. His tireless efforts have not only built roads and infrastructure but have strengthened communities and enriched lives.

Rankin MacSween

Ironville

Rankin MacSween has dedicated more than four decades to redefining community economic development through visionary leadership. From 1995 until his retirement in 2021, he served as President and CEO of New Dawn Enterprises – the oldest community development corporation in Canada – transforming a small volunteer initiative into a nationally recognized model of social enterprise. Under his guidance, New Dawn pioneered approaches that combined business acumen with social purpose, reinvesting revenues to fuel new ventures and strengthen community resilience.

Mr. MacSween's innovative spirit is evident in projects such as the Eltuek Arts Centre, which converted a historic convent into a world-class creative hub. This initiative exemplifies his ability to recognize emerging needs and translate ambitious ideas into reality, fostering cultural vitality and economic opportunity. His leadership encouraged risk-taking and adaptability, enabling New Dawn to expand into healthcare, housing, immigration, food security, and the arts.

Beyond organizational achievements, MacSween has influenced policy and practice at provincial and national levels. A founding Director of the Canadian Community Economic Development Network, he championed new models for rebuilding communities in decline and demonstrated that innovation and collaboration can transform regions facing economic hardship.

Rankin MacSween's legacy is one of relentless innovation, grounded in a belief that communities can chart their own future. His transformative approach to social enterprise and his courage to challenge the status quo continue to inspire leaders and organizations across Canada.

Joel Plaskett

Dartmouth

Joel Plaskett is one of Nova Scotia's most influential cultural ambassadors. His three-decade career has shaped Canada's musical landscape while remaining deeply rooted in his home province. A celebrated artist, songwriter, producer, and mentor, Plaskett has released 23 albums and earned numerous accolades, including a JUNO Award, seven JUNO nominations, and over 50 East Coast Music and Music Nova Scotia Awards. His work captures the essence of Nova Scotia, with songs such as *Down at the Khyber* and *Nowhere With You* becoming anthems of regional identity and pride.

Beyond his artistic achievements, Plaskett has demonstrated a commitment to community and cultural development. He founded and owns Fang Recording in Dartmouth, a nationally recognized studio that has recorded over 160 acts, providing infrastructure for artists to create and thrive locally. His mentorship of emerging musicians and initiatives such as Window Inn Wednesdays foster connectivity, artistic collaboration and community connection.

Plaskett's philanthropic contributions are equally significant. Through numerous benefit performances and advocacy, he has helped raise millions for charities, including Canadian Mental Health initiatives, MusicCounts, and the restoration of heritage venues. His dedication to community engagement underscores his belief in the transformative power of the arts.

By choosing to build his career from Nova Scotia rather than larger industry hubs, Plaskett has strengthened the province's cultural economy and inspired generations of artists. His humility, generosity, and artistic excellence exemplify the highest standards of creative leadership. Joel Plaskett is not only an internationally respected musician but a tireless advocate for the arts and a proud champion of Nova Scotia's creative spirit.

Carolyn G.R. Thomas

East Preston

Carolyn Thomas has devoted her life to advancing human rights, and community empowerment. A distinguished leader, educator, and advocate, she has worked tirelessly to create a more inclusive and equitable society. Her contributions span decades of service in education, government, and community development, leaving an enduring mark on Nova Scotia.

Beginning her career as an educator, Ms. Thomas later served as Coordinator of Race Relations and Affirmative Action with the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission, where she championed systemic change and equity. She was instrumental in shaping policies on race relations and employment equity, and her leadership extended nationally through roles with the Canadian Race Relations Foundation and the Canadian Centre for Police Race Relations. Internationally, she represented Canada as part of a delegation observing the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa.

A trailblazer within the African United Baptist Association, Ms. Thomas broke barriers as one of its few female Moderators and inspired generations through her faith-based leadership. Her advocacy for educational reform through the Black Learners Advisory Committee transformed opportunities for African Nova Scotian youth. She also co-founded initiatives such as the Mary Preston Historical Society and the Preston Area Board of Trade, promoting cultural heritage and economic development.

Ms. Thomas's work has touched countless lives; empowering women, mentoring youth, and fostering dialogue on equity and inclusion. She has organized and presented workshops, conferences, and community development plans, and has been deeply involved in historical research on people of African descent. Her efforts have broadened opportunities for Black women in employment, business, and leadership, while strengthening community resilience.