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The Canadian Club of Toronto

*TVOntario in the year 2000*

Royal York Hotel

October 23, 2000

Speaking Remarks

Isabel Bassett

### Canadian Club – October 23, 2000

Thank you, Marilyn. *Je vous remercie de votre invitation. C'est un grand plaisir pour moi d'être chez vous aujourd'hui.* Thank you for inviting me here as your guest speaker. To tell you the truth, when I was President of the Canadian Club, I introduced dozens of speakers ... but never "spoke" myself. I began to feel like the perpetual bridesmaid. So it gives me great pleasure to be here with you today.

At the risk of being accused of favouritism I want to say a special thank you to the Honourable William G. Davis for coming out today. He was the Minister of Education who created TVOntario, and has been a supporter ever since.

And of course, I also want to thank the Honourable Dianne Cunningham, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities who made a special effort to be here. She is the Minister responsible for TVOntario.

#### *POLKAROO ENTERS*

And, as you can see, to mark the occasion of TVOntario's thirtieth anniversary, I've brought the most popular character ever on children's television ... that big time hit with kids in more than 60 countries ... Polkaroo. I invited Polkaroo, not because he's just been nominated for two Gemini's, but because he represents what TVOntario is all about in the year 2000.

First of all, Polkaroo symbolizes one of TVOntario's most cherished principles – we believe that learning is fun – and that is what Ontario's educational broadcaster is all about. He and Marigold and all their friends on TV bring joy to thousands of children in Ontario, while demonstrating basic cognitive skills—like reading, writing and using numbers.

Secondly, Polkaroo has been through several phases ... from inanimate stuffed toy to his latest incarnation in an animated series ... like all of us, he has evolved with the times ... just like TVOntario itself.

And that is what I want to talk to you about today ... TVOntario in the year 2000 and beyond ... how we're blending old and new as we refocus to meet our educational mandate in the new millennium.

This makes us different from everyone else in the industry and I want to talk about that difference today.

I also want to talk about how TVOntario is evolving by using the latest technologies to meet the lifelong learning needs of people living in a world where change is the norm.

And lastly, I want to talk about the value of Ontario having an educational broadcaster in our increasingly crowded world of television channels and Internet websites.

Now, what separates us from other broadcasters and what makes us unique is rooted in our educational mandate. Ever since TVOntario was established by Bill Davis 30 years ago, we have been an integral part of the Ontario educational system. We are funded largely by Government with increasing support from the public and business.

As such, we have been providing programs for learners ... from pre-schoolers to seniors for three decades ... garnering over 800 awards along the way.

No other broadcaster – no matter how good their programs might be – can say that their programs are linked as closely as ours to the province's educational curriculum or the skills and lifelong learning needs of the people of this province.

More than 3 million viewers tune in to our two networks, English TVO and French TFO, each week. Our children's programming is number one in Ontario in the morning and the afternoon.

We offer children — both pre-school and after school — quality educational television that is non-commercial and non-violent ... and, through our TVO Kids ... we provide a direct link to the Ontario school curriculum. When your kids tune in, you know they will get high quality programming.

But TVOntario's mandate is to serve everyone, not just children. We reach out to people of all ages ... in every part of this great province ... people who want and need to learn.

And today, this is more important than ever ... we all have to adapt to new technology, new working conditions, changing lifestyles and globalization.

The President of Acadia University spoke on this very topic last week, right here at the Canadian Club. Dr. Kelvin Olgivie said ... people can no longer rely on one course of training or degree to learn what they'll need tomorrow ... because constant change demands we keep learning in order to keep up in tomorrow's world. And TVOntario is helping with our high quality broadcast and Internet learning.

This is what sets us apart in an electronic world that offers information, entertainment, "infotainment" and even "edutainment".

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We provide kids' programs that prepare pre-schoolers for the challenges of the classroom. Our websites and broadcasts complement the K-12 curriculum. We work with colleges and universities, so our programs can enrich their courses. We harness the power of new technologies, such as the Internet, to provide skills upgrades and workplace training online.

In short, TVOntario is helping to meet the learning needs of the people of this province from before they even go to school, until long after they retire.

The value of having a broadcast licence means that we can use our programs on television to send our viewers to our websites and use our websites to promote our broadcasts. And that's what sets us apart.

The President of Sheridan College, Sheldon Levy recognized the value of this, when he wrote to the CRTC recently to say, "it is clear that TVOntario's role as a provider of educational television and new media programming is more important than ever."

Our renewed mandate and its focus on education has meant our commitment to kids is stronger than ever. It has been reinforced by the excellent study that Dr. Fraser Mustard and Margaret McCain, who is here today, did for the Ontario Government.

Their *Early Years Study* found that a child's formative experiences and interactions with others are far more important for positive brain development than previously recognized. This is especially true during the first three years of life.

They also said our society must focus on children's early years if Ontario is to continue to produce well-educated, well-rounded citizens, capable of participating in the workplace and contributing to our social environment.

Educators in Ontario have found that the two biggest challenges facing children when they first arrive at school, are lack of self-esteem, and social skills. Without development in these critical areas, cognitive learning cannot take place.

And that's where we come in. TVOntario helps with our many programs that teach these skills. Just one example is *Blue's Clues*, which uses animation and a live host to lead young viewers calmly through a series of decisions where they get big rewards for making the right choices.

After watching our shows (...which are more than just cartoons...) they're better prepared to meet the challenges of the classroom.

The Honourable Margaret Marland, who is also here today, is the Minister responsible for The Children's Secretariat. We're hoping to partner with them and then broadcast to all Ontarians the important work they are doing ... all of which is geared to give everyone a good start in life.

Of course, children's programming is the cornerstone to our public service. But it's not the whole story by any means. When it comes to adult programs, we all recognise that an awareness of the issues facing our province is an important component of any educational system. It makes for better citizens. No other broadcaster devotes so much time to exploring important issues here in Ontario, through debate, discussion and documentaries.

**Les deux émissions, *Studio 2* et *Panorama* reflètent l'Ontario aux ontariens.** TVO's *Studio 2* and TFO's *Panorama* reflect Ontario ideas and issues back to the citizens of this

province. Can you imagine any other network focussing on northern issues, Ontario talent and artists as much as we do?

In keeping with our mandate to focus more on Ontario and on education, *Studio 2* and *Panorama* are looking more at issues from the Ontario perspective and at places right across the province. As one woman from South River told me last weekend, these programs on TVO are her only link with what's going on in the rest of the province.

That said, there's a very good reason we run mysteries, cooking shows and comedies too. These programs bring balance to a schedule that also provides documentaries, history and science programs.

More importantly, these mysteries and dramas attract viewers ... most of whom become active contributors and members of TVOntario, bringing in more than one half of our earned revenues. And ... for all the members here or watching ... thank you! That money enables us to continue to produce and acquire the quality, uninterrupted programming for which we are famous.

There's a good reason as well for our famous *Saturday Night at the Movies*. I know that almost everyone broadcasts movies – old movies, new movies – even blue movies.

But, *Saturday Night at the Movies* sets the artistic and historical context for our viewers through in-depth interviews with artists, actors and behind-the-scenes craftspeople. These interviews are a "must" for any student of film.

You don't have to just take my word for it.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences — the people that bring us the Oscars — have already recognized the value of our memorable interviews for future academic research.

And, for the first time this year, both *Saturday Night at the Movies* and *Sunday Night at the Cinema*, are being presented in association with York University, Confederation College and Carleton University, as a required or recommended component of their Film Course work.

As you can see, our entire program schedule is carefully planned and structured to engage the minds of people of all ages.

TVOntario is not unlike a university: we have a broad offering to the public that adds up to an excellent learning environment.

And it comes in both French and English. Our French network — TFO — serves the one million francophones and francophiles in Ontario — people who take a keen interest in French language and culture.

En effet, nos programmes et émissions sont produits pour soutenir le curriculum franco-Ontarien. French is taught in schools, colleges and universities and we support those curriculum courses with our programs on TFO. We want Ontario students to learn about Ontario.

Many universities require at least one course in a second language to be granted a degree. Certainly I had to have a research capability in French when I was awarded a Master's degree from York University.

Quelle est la meilleure façon d'apprendre une langue... Is there a better way to learn a language or experience a culture than to be able to hear it and see it through programming ... programming that is specifically produced to reflect this culture and speak to the needs of the community?

I'm especially proud ... je suis tellement fière de TFO pour nos cinq nominations de prix Gémeaux ... because two of TFO's shows for children and 'tweens were nominated for a record five Gémeaux awards this year.

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And now we have added another aspect to our educational portfolio.

Today we are able to harness the power of the Internet to develop the most effective combination of technologies for delivering educational material to the people of Ontario.

Our Internet websites offer educational material for children, students, teachers, parents and caregivers.

The Internet is ideal for education and skills training because it's interactive and flexible ... and TVOntario is providing Ontario, educational information ... the way we have on television for 30 years.

But websites aren't just for kids. They're the NEW way to do research and to learn. We're administering the new \$5 million "Lifelong Learning Challenge Fund" announced by Dianne Cunningham, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities.

TVOntario was chosen to produce and deliver skills training online because we have a proven track record of delivering knowledge where and when it is needed. Better yet, we can deliver knowledge that people find easy to access ... and there's a proven need for this service.

You know that workers have to make sure their skills keep up with changing needs. You know there are often gaps in these skills that sometimes take too long to address. The \$5 million dollar challenge fund is designed to encourage matching funds from various sectors to close these gaps quickly.

Here's where you come in. If a professional association... union... or your business group needs to sharpen its members' skills, we are the ideal partner.

We can work with you to develop an Internet based, interactive, distance education package. Your members or workers can download the data, do independent study and maybe even get independently evaluated. And then they can use this learning in your workplace.

In fact, I'll be meeting this afternoon with Rob Prichard, the former President of the University of Toronto, who is chairing the jury which will decide which partners and proposals we work with. He's come up from his new post at Harvard University to help with this important project.

We're making great progress developing learning programs on the Internet for our education system, but we can be much more effective with the right partners.

Let me explain.

Just last week, we launched Homework Online, in collaboration with the Ontario Public Libraries. We chose to work with libraries because not every student has Internet access at home, but they can get it at their local library.

This homework service is called *Eureka!* Students can get help with homework by linking directly with teachers online, five nights a week. Think of the value of this for students who might need a little extra help or who might be shy about asking a question in front of the class.

TVOntario is helping ensure that students get a quick response and the help they need.

Our other partners for this service are Lakehead University, Brock University and The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, who are supplying the teachers. And we are delivering this service in both official languages. **C'est un service bilingue.**

By the way, about the second day of this service, we got a call from a grateful parent. You know the situation ... parents take one look at the Algebra text and go white, knowing they can't help with homework.

Well, this parent called thanking us for Homework Online. She was thrilled that we had dealt with fractions and wanted to know when we were going to tackle ratios. Well, with the right partners ... we'll get there, too.

And, just last week we launched a new interactive series of games, which complement the Grade 4-8 curriculum ... called "reWire" ... games that deal with stereotyping and anti-racism. Our partners in that project were the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews - now renamed the Canadian Council to Promote Equality and Respect.

TVOntario's ability to broadcast significant programs from our educational institutions is leading to other interesting and rewarding partnerships that can benefit all Ontarians.

For instance, we are now working with the University of Toronto's Munk International Centre on a series on Canada and globalization. We're producing four prime time specials with them entitled *Going Global*.

The first one was broadcast with a live student audience from the Munk Centre last Wednesday. And while the program was being broadcast, viewers' online comments were also on-air. And the broadcast was followed by an interactive online discussion with students, viewers and the on air guests. This is the true meaning of convergence.

It was a huge success and gave people across the province a chance to interact with the experts. The program was interesting and informative and focused attention on the newly opened Munk Centre, one of our newest partners.

And our partners are impressed that our promos on television are directing people to these online programs.

I wish I had time to tell you another twenty stories about the importance of TVOntario to Ontario students and workers. I've had a really interesting career as a broadcaster, university board chair, author, academic and politician, but I can tell you that heading TVOntario is the most rewarding thing I've done.

I work with incredibly talented and dedicated people at TVOntario ... people who help make the difference. And if I ever need a morale boost, I just read some of the 6,000 letters, phone messages and e-mails that we get every single week from kids, parents, and business people who say we've made a difference. So, although business people like you may not be watching our children's programs, you are benefiting from them.

I don't have to tell you the value of an educated and motivated workforce that can interact with others productively. You know the value of training and lifelong learning. And you know that in human resources development, it's pay now or pay later.

Either the educational system gets employees ready to be productive in your offices, or you'll have to spend more money training them.

As you can see, every day, we're becoming a bigger part of the system that you need. So here's where we can help each other.

We're looking for partners who want to be an integral part of the Ontario educational system by helping sponsor great projects like the ones I've been speaking about.

We know many organizations want to make a difference too, and I'm here to tell you -- that if you want to make a real and lasting contribution to Ontario learners --partnering with TVOntario will make a difference to you and us.

But we can't do it alone. We all have a responsibility to nurture the productive and creative citizens of the future.

I'd like to invite each of you to take a good, hard look at what we are doing, and what we are capable of doing. Then, consider ways of becoming partners with us in our mission.

To survive in the information-based global markets of tomorrow, people of all ages must be adaptable. In short, they need access to the lifelong learning provided by TVOntario.

My friend Polkaroo had to adapt to keep his audience and stay employed for over 30 years. I know how hard that is - I've worked in television, too.

Polkaroo and all of us at TVOntario are working hard to prepare Ontario students and workers to cope with the changes of tomorrow.

Ontario needs TVOntario, and we need you.

Thank you.