

Heather Stefanson  
Finding and Maintaining the Balance  
by  
Brian Campbell

Politics has been part of Heather Stefanson's life, almost from the very beginning. Over the years she has been involved in both Federal and Provincial politics, either as a volunteer, an employee, or as an elected official. However, being a political mom has its challenges. Heather says, "The most challenging part is balancing family life, with kids who play hockey and volley ball and ultimate (Frisbee) and soccer and all their other sports and birthday parties and other special occasions; and at times I have committee, or we're in session and the time is not my own."

"My kids were born into this," Heather says. "I was elected before they were born."

Heather and Jason have two children; Victoria (14) and Tommy (12) and she says that the secret to the balance is that, "I have a great supportive husband. He travels a lot, but he is very helpful when he is home."

Heather's political future began to take shape when, after graduating from St. John's-Ravenscourt, she went to the University of Western Ontario in London, Ontario to get her undergraduate degree in Political Science. From there she moved to Ottawa to take a job as Special Assistant in the Prime Minister's office under Brian Mulroney.

But Heather's interest in politics goes back even further than that. Her father ran against Lloyd Axworthy in 1977. "I can recall going door to door when I was seven years old," Heather says. "And it was a lot of fun. I really enjoyed it."

Her mother was also a huge influence in her political life. Heather says, "She taught me the importance of giving back to the community."

Heather returned to Manitoba in 1993 to take a job in the office of Charles Mayer, the Minister of Agriculture at the time. "I wanted to move back home," she says.

After the Conservative loss in 1993, Heather switched careers and got into the investment business. "I eventually moved over to Wellington West Capital," she

says. “I worked for Charlie Spiring, who was a great mentor. Working for him, I learned a lot about the investment business.”

Heather and her husband Jason got married in 1998 and bought their first home in Tuxedo. “When I moved into the area, I thought that I would like to get involved in provincial politics here,” she says.

So she volunteered on Gary Fillmon’s Executive in Tuxedo for the next two years. When Gary resigned in 2000, Heather decided run for the position. “I thought, ‘I’ve helped out on the Executive, I’ve gotten to know people in the community, this is something I’d like to do’,” she says. “One thing I loved about the investment business is working with people and helping them achieve their financial goals. When you love that, it’s a really great thing to get into politics and be able to help people on so many different levels and in so many ways.”

So Heather sought and won the provincial nomination and at the November 2000 by-election, she was elected and has held the position ever since. She says, “One of the most rewarding things is when you can actually make a difference in people’s lives.”

Heather was very involved in setting up Special Olympics Manitoba Awareness Week. “It is now the second week of June every year. The Special Olympians come to the Manitoba Legislature, they have a Bocce tournament with the MLA’s and it’s just a lot of fun, she says. “It brings awareness to Special Olympics Manitoba, an organization I’ve been involved with on their honorary board for a number of years.”

Jason and Heather met through Heather’s father. She says, “Jason worked for a senator in Ottawa when I was working there. He was back in Winnipeg for a party fundraising event and met my father, who said, ‘My daughter works in Ottawa. You should give her a call. He called me and we met at the Elephant and Castle in Ottawa for a drink and the rest is history.’”

Jason and Heather both ended up moving back to Winnipeg and continued their relationship here. “We both love Manitoba,” Heather says. “This is the place we call home.”

Jason has a law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School, but now works in investment banking at CIBC. He is Vice Chairman and his main job is to bring businesses together. “He is very social as well,” Heather says. “Together, we could

be out every night of the week at events if we wanted to. There is no shortage of things to be involved with.”

Jason does his share of giving back to the community. He is currently working on a project to support military families called, True Patriot Love. Jason is one of the co-chairs and Heather is part of the organizing committee.

Jason also plays hockey. Heather likes to stay active as well, and has recently been involved in a triathlon. She is now training for her next in the summer of 2016. She says, “My job gets a little crazy at times. The exercise is a very important component in getting your mind off politics.”

“Along with Assiniboine Park, the community centre and all the wonderful things here in Tuxedo, what is great about Manitoba is all the lakes we have. And the great thing about Winnipeg is the proximity to all those lakes,” Heather says. “One of the things we like to do most as a family is go to the lake in the summer. The kids love it, and we have our fun too. It is a great way to see nature and to enjoy time with family.”

Heather and Jason have their roots planted firmly in Manitoba. Heather says, “The people, first and foremost, make Manitoba a great place to live. But if you look at the things that Manitoba has to offer, that Winnipeg has to offer; we have such an incredible arts community, you can’t go without mentioning the Jets, the Bombers and all of the exciting things that are happening in our city. We have such huge potential for our city and I’m very excited about it.”

The whole family is very involved with the Tuxedo community. Heather says, “My kids both play hockey and soccer through the Tuxedo Community Centre. Jason and I have been supportive of the zoo project and everything going on at the park. When we moved into the neighbourhood, it was nothing like it is today. It is a spectacular part of our community.”

Between the many events and activities that the whole family are involved in they like to get out for walks in the park with their dog, Reagan and going to the zoo, but sometimes down time is in order. Heather says, “Sometimes it’s nice to just sit down and watch a movie together. We are very busy and it’s nice to have that quiet time as a family.”

For Heather, living in Tuxedo is a return to her roots. “My father grew up in one of the first homes in Tuxedo, 121 Park Boulevard. He attended École Tuxedo School,” she says. “The school has a log, and they showed me my aunt and my

father when they were going to school. I have incredible roots in the community, even though I didn't grow up here."

Heather plans to continue working on the balance between her desire to help her community and her love for her family. She says, "It's been a really rewarding life. The great part of my job is the people that I have had the opportunity to meet. I am honoured to have met them."

Heather tries to make every day a learning experience and, so far, it has worked for her. "One thing that I have found is that every person I have met, I have learned something from," she says. "Everyone can have up days and down days. The important thing is taking the positive out of everything that you've gained from your day. When I sit back and reflect on the day, I think of the people I have met and I can pick out what I have learned from them. That is something that I take home and it keeps me grounded in what I do."