

2014 Lynda Garland Award Announced

July 2, 2014 - The Lynda Garland "Award for Excellence" was presented for the sixth time at the Canadian Baton Twirling Championships in Calgary, Alberta. The recipient of Lynda Garland's "Award for Excellence" was Brenda Bennett, of Saskatoon.

At the 2008 Canadian Championships in Moncton, NB, the CBTF recognized Lynda Garland's years of service to Baton Twirling in Canada and around the world by creating a new award that bears her name. Among Ms. Garland's many accomplishments, she was one of the founders of the Twirl Canada organization and was its first President from 1979 through 1983. Twirl Canada went on to become the [Canadian Baton Twirling Federation](#) [1] (CBTF), which was a charter member of the [World Baton Twirling Federation](#) [2](WBTF) when it was formed. Lynda served as President of the World Baton Twirling Federation between 1983 and 2008.

Ms. Garland established the criteria for the new award. The Lynda Garland "Award For Excellence" is presented to a Canadian Baton Twirling Federation (CBTF) Coach who exemplifies excellent, progressive coaching, superior technical abilities and provides innovative ideas and programs.

In presenting the award, Ms. Garland touched on the many highlights of Ms. Bennett's career:

Brenda was coached by Maureen Johnson, Regina, Saskatchewan. She represented Canada as a Senior Free stylist in the very first World Baton Twirling Championships in Seattle, Washington in 1980. She was also a Canadian and World team member representing Canada in Japan in 1982.

Brenda moved to Saskatoon and started the Optimist Twirling Connection (OTC) in 1983. She has been coaching for 31 years.

Currently, the Optimist Twirling Connection has 53 athletes, one of the largest (if not the largest) twirling club in the country. Their Head coach is Brenda Bennett, along with coaches Casey Berry, Kellie Towriss, Meghan Allen, and assistant coaches and demonstrators. The program also offers gymnastics training. Currently, the Optimist Twirling Connection (OTC) and competitive athletes are also students of Brenda's School of Baton and Dance. The studio is home to over 350 families in Saskatoon, and offers many disciplines, including jazz, tap, ballet, contemporary, lyrical, musical theatre, and hip hop. Athletes also attend clinics when the opportunity presents itself, and Brenda is open to bringing in experts to work with the athletes whenever possible.

Brenda contributes to Saskatchewan Fall Clinic planning and recruiting; has taught at clinics within Saskatchewan, across Canada, and Internationally, notably, the post-competition clinic at the World Championships in Osaka Japan, 2004.

She takes any opportunity to have OTC twirlers perform at Basketball tournament half-time shows (Particularly, BRIT basketball tournament in Saskatoon for many years, and the Harlem Globetrotters), community gatherings such as large fundraisers and celebrations. Brenda invites media to events and practices leading up to high profile competitions to expose the sport within Saskatchewan.

Brenda has sat on various committees throughout the years. She is currently a member of the Saskatoon Technical Committee as the Judge's Representative. Brenda is a Level 3 CBTF Coach and Judge, and has over 30 yrs experience coaching the sport. She has taken a total of 17 of her athletes to international competitions including the World Championships and International Cup.

She was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Canadian Baton Twirling Federation in 2005, and nominated

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for the 2006 YWCA Women of Distinction Award in Saskatoon. She received the Saskatchewan Sport Coach Dedication Award in 2011, and in 2014, Brenda's School of Baton and Dance was voted the Consumer's Choice in Saskatoon.

OTC athletes compete in CBTF individual events (Solo, Duet, 2- and 3-Baton, Medley, SoloDance), International Cup events (Solo, 2-Baton, 3-Baton, Artistic Twirl and Artistic Pair), and WBTF events such as freestyle, pair and team. OTC athletes also compete avidly in CBTF group dance twirls and teams.

Brenda has the ability to motivate athletes and believe in their own ability. She is always supportive and regularly takes the extra step to ensure athletes have the opportunities, the support, and the motivation to reach their goals. She encourages her athletes to dream big. Brenda always finds a way to make things work – no obstacle is too big for her to tackle, with the athletes best interests at heart. She is a positive role model for all the athletes' lives that she touches, and always has an anecdotal story at hand, applicable for almost any life lesson!

She also ensures to match her dress attire, in some way, to the costume of the athlete competing that day! A very thoughtful and important coaching attribute.

Brenda has achieved many, many accomplishments with her athletes over the years. Her accomplishments with her athletes attending the World Baton Twirling Championships and the WBTF International Cup events are as follows:

- 1991 – World Championships, Italy, with Angela Gardiner, Junior Free stylist
- 2000 – World Championships, Holland, with Pairs athletes Stephanie Hart & Casey Berry – World Silver Medalists Pair
- 2001 – World Championships, France, with Pairs Hart & Berry, free stylist Casey Berry
- 2002 – World Championships, Saskatoon, with Free stylist Stephanie Hart
- 2003 – World Championships, Spain, with Free stylists Hart and Berry
- 2004 – World Championships, Japan, with OTC Team of Casey Berry, Stephanie Hart, Kellie Towriss, Charnalle Skjeie, Haylee Olver & Breanne Tennant (5th Place), as well as Pairs Hart & Berry (5th Place), and Free stylists Hart & Berry
- 2005 – World Championships & International Cup, Minneapolis, with OTC Team of all above + Beth Kostur, as well as Pairs Berry & Hart, and Free stylist Hart; individual International Cup athletes. – WBTF Pairs Bronze Medalists and Team Bronze Medalists
- 2006 – World Championships & International Cup, Italy, Free stylist and International Cup athlete, Casey Berry
- 2012 – World Championships, France, Junior Free stylist Julia Newton
- 2013 – International Cup, Holland, A Team of “Classic Storm” and A Group “Time Warp” – including athletes Julia Newton, Mackenzie Wacker, Heather Dietrich, Brittany Muyard, Marie Lashyn, Emily Lealos, Marina Magula-Figora, Lindsey McInnes, Alex Pickrell, and Kaitlyn Lealos – finishing 5th and 7th place respectively; individual International Cup athletes as well, including B Artistic Pair silver medalists, Dietrich & Muyard
- 2014 – World Championships in England, will take Dietrich and Muyard to represent Canada in Junior Pairs

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