



MARY AITKEN

Woman of Distinction 2008 Entrepreneurship



Some rare people you meet in your lifetime make you want to be the best that you can be. **Mary Aitken**, Managing Director and Founder of Verity Women's Club, is this person to many. A top Canadian woman entrepreneur (Profit Magazine), this devoted mother of six boys has ironically made her biggest impact on the lives of women and girls in Toronto.

A successful entrepreneur of rare vision and community-mindedness, Mary Aiken took her intimate knowledge of the multi-tasking stress of most women's lives and developed a unique and vibrant business: Verity Women's Club. An oasis of calm, neutrals and elegance, Verity is a third sphere - between office and home - for women whose hectic careers and family obligations otherwise keep them on the run, with no time for themselves. Her vision was to create a place where remarkable women do remarkable things for themselves and each other. Business, pleasure, fitness, health, spa, flowers, art, culture and cuisine - she wanted it all at Verity.

Under her leadership, Verity has become the fastest growing private club in Toronto. In a 50,000 square foot facility, Mary developed Verity as an engaging, vibrant environment where women could connect on a variety of levels. Along with influential business networking, spa facilities, and fitness Verity has one of Toronto's top restaurants, George. Not turning its back on the community, the club regularly opens its doors to women from Regent Park and shares with them the luxury of the venue and the opportunity to talk to member volunteers about their personal and professional challenges. Verity also runs a weekly Girls Club which brings together a group of 10-year-old girls and mentors. Because of Mary, Verity nourishes the bodies and minds of all who join its community.

At times, the determination to make such a place work seemed pure folly. Others had tried and failed at exactly this type of business. But Mary conducted extensive research and was resolute not to fall into similar traps. Unwavering, Mary stuck to the core of her vision, and insisted to all who would listen that the time had come to have a women's club that would make a difference in the Toronto community.



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Verity is just her latest venture. Moving from one successful entrepreneurial venture to the next, Mary's approach over the years has been marked by a devotion to bringing others forward with her as she expanded her own horizons. Starting in the financial business in the United Kingdom, Mary moved to Canada and founded a start-up courier company, Pronto Toronto, which grew to 120 employees in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal. Mary followed this by founding an investment banking company. She raised equity funds from Canadian and international financial institutions for a broad range of North American companies through public and private placements specializing in the natural resource sector. Not satisfied to sit still in her few hours off, she simultaneously syndicated and managed a residential income investment company in London, U.K.

Later still, Mary partnered with her husband Peter Gundy to co-found Neo Material Technologies Inc. Listed on the TSX, NMT rose from a start-up to annual sales of over \$150 million, and 1,600 employees in the high tech performance materials end of the electronics industry.

Facing uphill battles, taking great risk with intense determination while building community and using business acumen to create new ventures and opportunities for other women and girls, this is what makes Mary Aitken a Woman of Distinction.