

Distinguished Edmontonian works on behalf of others
by Heather Andrews Miller
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Austin Mardon travelled to Rideau Hall in Ottawa to add the Order of Canada medal (left) to his others, the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee, the Centennial, and one from the US government in recognition of his work in the Antarctic. Photo supplied by Catherine Mardon.

Dr. Austin Mardon has many accomplishments to his credit. Born in the capital city in the 1960s, Mardon received his bachelor of arts degree from the University of Lethbridge, then followed it with a masters of science degree in geography from South Dakota state university, a masters of education degree from Texas A & M and a PhD in geography from Greenwich university's on-line program.

As if that wasn't enough, he has also authored more than 20 books and 110 scholarly publications dealing with Antarctic research. His studies took him to that southern destination for two months where he examined meteorite impacts only 170 kilometres from the South Pole, which led to him becoming director of the Antarctic Institute of Canada.

All of these accomplishments are even more

Medicine Hat and Brooks.

The statistics are startling as to the reasons for the men's state of despair. "More than 75 percent of homeless people are suffering from schizophrenia or other mental illness. And the tragedy of it all, is that being out of work and homeless means no counselling, and no medications," he says, adding that the problems the men have can be successfully treated with medication and they can return to active living and working. "It's a basic need for all of us, to live a normal life like everyone else." Living in a positive environment like the Champion's Centre reduces the risk of relapsing into former self destructive behaviours and cycling back into the system.

The public can help by offering to serve on the new board in Edmonton, and other non-profit organizations are encouraged to strike partnerships to better serve their clients. "We hope to work with major stakeholders so we can be stronger," he says. The group is encouraged by the city's recent declaration to eliminate homelessness and hope some involvement or funding support at the municipal level is forthcoming as well. More information can be obtained at www.thechampionscentre.ca or on his website at www.austinmardon.org and he also encourages folks who are interested to e-mail him at aamardon@yahoo.ca. A Canada-wide system of Centres is a long-term goal and the need has never been greater than now, with the recession at its peak creating difficult financial times for the disadvantaged.

Currently, Mardon is adding to his series of books on politicians with one in progress on Scandinavian public figures. "I'm going to be reworking some old manuscripts as well," he adds. University and high school student volunteers are eagerly helping with this task, much to his enjoyment. "I find it very inspiring to work with them."

Klaas Klooster is founder and executive director of

amazing when it's learned that Dr. Mardon was diagnosed with schizophrenia in 1992, at the age of 30.

"Usually it occurs in the teenage years for men, so I developed it later," he says. "I've been successful, though, because just like everyone, I maintain a delicate balance in my life. But perhaps my need is more pronounced and I require regular medications. I have taken life more slowly than I might have otherwise, and varied my activities between employment, writing, and volunteer work."

Mardon's lengthy book list includes such stunning titles as *International Law and Space Rescue Systems*, *Political Networks in Alberta 1905 – 1992*, and *The Contribution of Geography to the Recovery of Antarctic Meteorites*. He has also co-authored a number of books with his father Ernest, a retired University of Lethbridge professor. "I've received a lot of help from my family, and from my wife Catherine, who is a retired lawyer, and who has supported me all the way," he adds.

A few years ago Mardon was working with Canadian Mental Health and came in contact with the Champion's Centre Inc. in Ponoka. The Centre houses men with significant barriers, some with simply a lack of skills, but most often a combination of factors that lead to the inability to care for one's self properly, leading to homelessness. The Champion's Centre does not have a rigorous program but over a period of time a trust is built and the men are gently encouraged to increase their areas of development, grooming and life skills. By treating the men with love, dignity and respect, they make improved personal choices over time, returning to work and living in the larger community. "I began to volunteer with the organization and I eventually served on their national board," he says. He went on to form the local advisory group that aims to see a similar Centre built in Edmonton. The successful Ponoka concept has already been duplicated in

the Ponoka Champion's Centre and adds that Mardon has a real heart for the poor, especially those with schizophrenia. "He's done a lot of work on their behalf, trying to create awareness about mental illness. When he was invited to address our fifth anniversary celebrations a couple of years ago, he realized that a similar facility in Edmonton could be welcomed." The lower values in the current economic market present a better opportunity to find suitable property. "We know we can get funds from federal and provincial government programs. And the public is always welcome to donate as well through a convenient link on the website, although promoting awareness of the problem of mental illness and homelessness is even more beneficial," he says.

Mardon concludes by reminding his fellow-Albertans that even in tough financial times, there is much for which we can be thankful. "Dollars aren't everything, and the material objects in life don't bring happiness," he concludes. There are other things like family, friends, relationships, and volunteering that are important that bring us joy."

Know of a worthy organization or individual who we can salute? Comments and suggestions for this column are welcome. Please e-mail me at hcmiller@shaw.ca