

# The Minerva Foundation for BC Women

By Valerie Giles

Named for the complex Roman goddess Minerva, the purposes for establishing this Foundation are both ambitious and multifaceted.

The mythology surrounding Minerva identifies her as the goddess of wisdom and of handicrafts – defined as painting, poetry, teaching, medicine, dyeing, spinning, weaving and sewing. Those delightful old encyclopedias contain details long left out of recent editions. For example, the 1961 Encyclopedica Americana notes that “Minerva was also patroness of warriors who won victory through cunning, prudence, courage and perseverance.” Because of that distinction and goddess capacity, Minerva is portrayed wearing a helmet and armour, carrying a spear and a shield.

Launched in February 2001 by women leaders based mostly in Vancouver, the Minerva Foundation is intentionally non-partisan. Despite that, the founding board is a virtual powerhouse of politically-active women representing the entire political spectrum. It follows naturally that people interested in leadership would gravitate towards elected office and other positions of influence.



## MINERVA foundation

Focussing on four priority areas: education, safety, economic security, and leadership development, the Foundation works to give practical assistance to help women realize their potential. The education program features a \$10,000 bursary with preference given to recipients who are single mothers. The safety program strives to provide outreach and support to women who experience violence and teaches them to create safe environments while developing life skills to support that. Women learn to build self esteem,

resolve conflicts, and work towards living in safety. The economic security program seeks to make women aware of the need for having a financial plan, to encourage entrepreneurial activity, and build towards financial security. The leadership program encourages women to run for elected office and to develop skills for career advancement.

There have been two successful “Learning to Lead” conferences where 30 Grade 11 girls, 30 women graduate students, and 30 professional women are brought together for a weekend of workshops on leadership. Discussions are held around issues pertinent to their interests such as ethical leadership for women and women’s ways of communicating.

The Minerva Foundation is organizing a new program called “Follow A Leader.” This is organized so a group of women chosen from Grade 12 through to graduate studies gets to meet and spend time at the workplaces of women holding senior executive positions or positions as community leaders. Weekend workshops and plenary sessions are included. The object is to build a network of contacts and to open possibilities for women to find potential men-

tors. Applicants get chosen through an essay contest.

UNBC Vice-President Dr. Deborah Poff currently serves as a Minerva Foundation board member. She is enthusiastic about leading establishment of a northern chapter, observing “I’ve watched women emerge from the leadership training and they’re ready to take on the world!”

To date, the Minerva Foundation has raised more than \$1 million in funds and gifts in kind. Bursaries have been awarded totalling \$405,000. The programs are already making a difference. Find more information at [www.theminervafoundation.com](http://www.theminervafoundation.com) and plan to get involved.

The northern chapter will be launched Saturday, September 20th in conjunction with the Today’s Woman Trade Show. This year’s bursary winner will be announced at a reception held from 5:00 pm to 6:30 pm at the Civic Centre. The Today’s Woman Awards banquet begins at 6:30 to honour outstanding women of the region in twelve award categories. For the first time, a special “Women In Leadership” award will be presented, sponsored by The Minerva Foundation.