

# THE PEAL

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## Celebrating Alberta's Master Bell Pioneer:

### *John Nelson*

Many bell enthusiasts, members of church congregations, teachers and thousands of children in Alberta might not know John Nelson Sr.'s name, but nevertheless they owe him a word of thanks for any joy that bells have brought them. It was John who first introduced our province to handbells, by placing the first Schulmerich 2-octave bell set at the First Baptist Church in Calgary in 1963. And did the art of handbell ringing in Alberta catch on! Since then, John has placed more than 180 bell sets in Alberta schools, and has placed many carillons in churches and important buildings across the province. At the age of 90, John is still helping teachers fix and learn about bells. Just this May, Calgary handbell teacher Vanessa Matthews wrote, "*I had John come out and look at them... The man is amazing!*" He *is* amazing and is a true part of our province's bell history.

In his young adulthood, John Nelson may not have suspected that bells would be in his future. He actually began his career as a member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and later moved into the sales industry. A love of handbells and carillons finally drew him to a sales position for Schulmerich in 1953, a position he has held for 58 years. In his first ten years with the company, he introduced Schulmerich's Carillonic Bell instruments to Churches, Universities, Colleges, and many Business companies. John recalls that his "best result[s] was the work I accomplished with the donor for the \$250,000.00 Carillon & the 140ft. Bell Tower at the University of British Columbia in 1966, which I eventually replaced...for the very High Tech Digital 318 Bell Carillon in 2007."

For Alberta's 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary gift to the citizens of Alberta, in 1966, John also installed a Schulmerich Mark V 300 Bell Carillon in the Legislature building for the Government of Alberta. At the time, there was a special Carillon room designed for the Carillon's console & the room also had a group of chairs so that people could enjoy listening & watching the *carillonneur* play the Carillon from the Organ type Console. Just this year in February, 2011, the Alberta Legislature Carillon of 1966 was replaced for the beautiful Schulmerich "CELEBRATION" Carillon. This is played from a Three Manual Bell Console and commenced operating when this spring's Government session opened.