

BULLETIN

## HSA activist training helped pave the way for city councillor

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**hes an award-winning** health science professional. Shes an HSA steward. And shes a Prince George city councillor and community activist.

-Its lots of work," says Debora Muñoz. -I dont think the general public has any clue as to the magnitude of the amount of work involved," she says about her role as city councillor. -There are so many community events; I literally get anywhere from 35 to 40 emails a day. I pick and choose which events I can attend, and sometimes Im asked to attend events for our mayor when our mayor is out of town" she said.

In her first year in office, Muñoz has garnered the trust and praise of Prince George residents with her record of principled, community-minded positions on issues affecting the city and region.

For example, she was the only councillor who voted against increasing gambling opportunities in downtown Prince George.

-My co-councillors voted in favour of building a brand new community gaming centre in downtown Prince George," she said. -However, I felt I was acting in the best interests of the entire community and I voted against it ... because I really didnt think it was a healthy choice. I felt it would increase problems in our city core; the patrons who frequent casinos are often people who cant afford to go there in the first place, so I was really concerned about an increase in the social woes in our community," she said.

-Im happy to say that lots of people come up to tell me they are glad I took a stand against increased gambling in Prince George."

Although she was over-ruled in this decision, Muñoz demonstrates her grace and resilience in her well-considered response: -I dont agree with the other councillors," she said. -Having said that, however, I respect that councillors made a decision ... and its moving ahead. We are going to have a community gaming centre in downtown Prince George. At the end of the day, I feel that I made the right decision and I feel like I did what the electorate expected of me ... to represent them."

At the beginning of October, Muñoz presided as acting mayor at an annual event celebrating the achievements of BC women living in the north. She was also attending as a nominee.

Debora Muñoz Electroneurophysiology Technologist Prince George Regional Hospital
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-We have some phenomenal women in the north in leadership capacities who are very giving of themselves on a voluntary level, who are incredibly intuitive, great mentors, and great leaders. We are very blessed to have amazing women living in northern BC," she said.

-There are now 14 categories in which women are recognized at this event," she added. -Some of the categories are women in leadership, women in enhanced education, leadership and youth, aboriginal woman of the year, business woman of the year ... and the new category that I was nominated in is technology leadership," she added.

Nominated by a senior administrator in the Northern Health Authority, Muñoz was selected from among seven nominees for the award sponsored by Applied Sciences Technologists and Technicians of BC.

The leadership in technology award was developed to recognize the importance of technology careers for women in all of BC, Muñoz said.

-Particularly in the north ... we are on an economic rise right now, so there are technology careers for women in everything from aviation to electronics, manufacturing and construction, mining and the environment, agronomy, biology, geology. And yet there's not a lot of recognition that these career opportunities are available for women," she said.

-For example, my own career in neurophysiology technology: it's virtually unknown to the general public. So people assume, usually, that I'm a doctor, because they have very little knowledge of what it is that I do," she said. -So it was an absolutely wonderful opportunity to be nominated, because then I was able to raise that profile and awareness of what neurophysiology technologists do, and the major role we play in allied health and in arriving at a diagnosis ... which ultimately leads to treatment and overall improvement of health and wellbeing for the individual," she said.

And what is neurophysiology technology? -I examine human brain activity in search of abnormalities," Muñoz said. -I will apply a number of electrodes to a person's head, using some paste, and then record their brain activity ... their brain waves ... in search of abnormalities.

-I might be looking at somebody who is sent to me because they may have seizures, or they may have multiple sclerosis; so, I could be checking their visual and auditory brain stem pathways in search of delays in response along the nerve pathways by evoking a response," she explained.

-For example, I might have someone sit in front of a black and white checked screen and have the checks reverse back and forth. I'd be monitoring and recording the traveling of that signal along the visual pathway in terms of time and latency and wave form. If there is a delay, that might be indicative of plaques ... of MS or that something similar.

-Or, for example, if there is a tumour in a certain part of the brain, then I could see focalized slowing of the brain waves in that area," she said.

-I love the fact that no two human brains are identical, that everyone who comes forward for testing is unique," Muñoz said. -It's never boring. You just don't know and you can never predict what you're dealing with in terms of findings.

-I love the fact that I'm a member of a health care team and that I get to help in arriving at a diagnosis, which ultimately can then be treated and helps in patient care management and improves overall health and wellbeing," she said.

-And it's really exciting because any day now, we're going to get brand new digital equipment. So we're making that transition from analogue over to digital monitoring equipment."

Her enthusiasm for her profession is replicated in her enthusiasm for life as a municipal politician, and she credits HSA for helping her build the foundation for public office.

-HSA was instrumental in preparing me for my political career. HSA provided the support financially, emotionally, and morally, to advance me so that I could go to campaign school provided through the union," she said.

-Also, taking part in the Canadian Women Voters Congress Campaign School was an incredible support. Two days of that school was held right in city council chambers in the City of Vancouver," she said.

-So here I was in the environment in which I was running for office and that allowed us to have a mock campaign. And at that mock campaign, I was the candidate ... and I won! So I had already won before I arrived in Prince George.

-I gained most of my support by going to the campaign schools because I was learning from other women who have had the experience, from other women who had either run for public office or were currently in public office. So that experience is immeasurable," she said.

-I came back and had all those tools that one needs in order to run a successful campaign. And its not about the money. You have to want to have and love public service and to be out there working on behalf of your community," she said.

Muñoz has high praise for HSAs education and political action initiatives helping members advocate for quality public services, as well as for their rights on the job. -Its a critical part to advancing health and wellbeing and wellness in our communities," she said. -Thats what our union is all about.

-The more we can motivate people the better. We can give them the support and tools they need to get out in their community ... not just in their daily jobs ... to get out there and promote and be the activist, be the voice for your neighbours and the disenfranchised, be the voice thats need to continue to sustain and enhance health and well being in our communities."

Muñoz puts her beliefs into action by mentoring and encouraging young women to get active in politics. She was recently a member of a five-woman panel on careers in politics. The panel included Shirley Bond, BCs minister of education and deputy premier, the mayors of MacKenzie and Valemount, a local school trustee, and a First Nations councillor.

Muñoz was particularly happy to hear the response from one young woman in the audience. -She said: thank you very much, because youve now demystified what I thought was an unreachable, impossible area to embark upon.

-Politics for women is now made easier. And my closing statement was that Im an ordinary woman who is now in a privileged position to do extraordinary things for a community that I love. So it felt good to know Im actually making a difference and encouraging women to participate."

Muñoz is looking forward with interest to the election race to replace outgoing HSA President Cindy Stewart in the spring.

-I think Cindy has been a phenomenal president. We are a strong union, we have a lot of members and health care is going through some major transitions and we all know what thats like," Muñoz said.

-Were all seeing the impact of those changes. Its very important to have a leader who has a fluent understanding of todays health care and social services," she said. -HSAs new president must have the leadership capacity thats needed to take HSA forward into the 21st century ... an individual who clearly understands those challenges like professional shortages, ongoing recruitment and retention, and knows how to move the membership forward in a positive way.

-This person really needs to have an understanding of the political climate, as well as the transitions, challenges the changes and the rewards of health care across the country," she added.

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180 East Columbia  
New Westminster, BC V3L 0G7

Website  
[www.hsabc.org](http://www.hsabc.org)

Telephone 604-517-0994  
1-800-663-2017