

HENRY CHARLES USHER, MBE



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In honor of Henry Charles Usher's dedicated and outstanding service to the Holy Redeemer Credit Union Limited and the Credit Union Movement in Belize, HRCU on the occasion of its 60th Anniversary Celebration has decided to award educational grants to deserving students who are members or are offspring of members of HRCU.

Henry Charles, affectionately known as "Eagles" was born on October 31, 1918 and served HRCU from its inception in May 1944 until the time of his passing on October 7, 1997. Mr. Usher holds the record for the longest serving president of HRCU and was also very instrumental in promoting the Movement during the pioneer years of the early 1940's along with the founder of the Credit Union Movement in Belize Fr. Marion M. Ganey, S.J.

Henry Charles was also the first Belizean to serve as Registrar and it was during his tenure in office that the first Credit Union Ordinance of 1947 was legislated giving power to both Credit Unions and Cooperatives to legally conduct business in Belize, then British Honduras.

HRCU takes pride in introducing its Annual Educational Grant Program named after this truly great credit union pioneer – Henry Charles "Eagles" Usher, MBE.

Henry and Jane

We all know that it was Fr. Marion Ganey, S.J. who introduced the Credit Union Movement in Belize. We are also aware that it was a humble priest who grew up in Boy's Town in the USA by the name of Henry Sutti of the Society of Jesus, following the lead of Fr. Ganey, who decided to bring the Credit Union to Belize City in May 1944. When one speaks of the largest most successful Credit Union in Belize, it is the name of Henry Usher's equal partner in life Jane Ellen Usher nee Price that echo in the hearts and minds of the 35,965 members of the 60 year old Holy Redeemer Credit Union.

Henry's association with Credit Unions goes back to those years when the people's bank was established in 1944 in Belize city. Henry had worked with Fr. Ganey from 1936 when the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) was formed. Henry, or Eagle as he was called by basketball fans, excelled not only in that sport, but in football, lawn tennis, table tennis and handball.

He entered the Government Service as a messenger and worked at the Post Office in different sections. When it was decided to separate Cooperative and Credit union from the Social Development Department, it was Henry who was appointed as the first registrar of the new department which came into being in January 1954. Registrar Usher got down to work to build up the department as new Credit unions and Cooperatives began to come into being. He drafted the first legislation and By-Laws of the Credit Union Movement. Henry received several honors during his lifetime. In 1995 he was elected to the Belize National Sports Hall of Fame. He was named the No. 1 basketball player of his era. It was while as the sport's top basketball player that he met and married Jane Ellen Price on January 3, 1942. The wedding was solemnized at the Holy Redeemer Cathedral by Fr. Francis Tully S.J. They did not know it then, but providence had brought them together for what turned out to be a bonanza and blessing for the people of Belize.



Henry was invited by Fr. Ganey to visit Fiji. It was there that the Credit Unions of that island presented Henry with one of Fiji's treasured gifts - The Whale Tooth.

Henry was already Registrar when Jane was a secretary at SJC. It was from that post that she was transferred by Bishop Hickey to take over as manager of HRCU in 1956. With a firm hand she guided the Credit Union, backed by Henry, to unbelievable and unprecedented financial heights. Together, the duo reached out to all Credit unions and potential members in a weekly program over Radio Belize called "The Credit union Hour."

Due to his failing eyesight, Henry gave up his post as Registrar. He went to the USA and took up an attachment at CUNA Mutual, in Madison, Wisconsin. It was there, he was able to get treatment for his eyes.

It is a known fact that it is the busy people who can find time to give more and more of themselves. Henry continued to serve on the Credit Union Board while he took up the post of Marketing Officer. When he left the Marketing Board he was offered a full time job as financial controller at HCU where he finished his long and faithful career. Henry's service in the Credit Union and Cooperative Movement was acknowledged by the Queen. He was appointed a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire.

Jane considered herself blessed in having Henry in the office with her as HRCU grew to the size it had. Having him there with Francis and Clement made it easier to go into politics. She was elected to the House of Representatives by the people of the Pickstock Division on (1979-84) and served during that term as Minister of State in the Ministry of Health, Housing, Cooperatives and Credit Unions. She again ran in 1984 and won. In the second term Jane served as a member of the PUP opposition. It is worthy of note that she was the only member of her party to win a seat in the ten Divisions in Belize City 1984.

When her party won the elections in 1989, Miss Jane did not run for elective office. She was elected by the House to be President of the Senate. In 1993, her two terms representing the voters of the Pickstock Division was rewarded by the PUP which bestowed on her the Order of Distinguished Service.

Miss Jane served as Chairperson of the Women's Commission during her tenure in office as Minister of State. For many years she was President of the PUP United Women's Group.

She was appointed a Justice of the Peace in 1964, which makes her one of the Belize's senior JP's. Jane was elected the first President of the British Honduras Credit Union League (now the Belize Credit Union League). Since 1956 this great woman has sat on the Board of Directors as an elected in the post of treasurer.

The Rotary club of Belize in December 2000 presented her with the Paul Harris Award.

Miss Jane was appointed Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire by the Queen. Her work in the Credit union Movement in Belize was well known in the Caribbean region. At the 45th Annual Caribbean Convention held in Ocho Rios, Jamaica,

Jane was given the CCCU Award for her outstanding service to the Credit Union Movement in Belize.

Miss Jane was able to keep the expenses over income low in the early years – late fifties and sixties. She was able to do so by employing people who were not interested in serving the CU than to make big bucks. Among the staff were several members of the Usher family. Like their parents they have kept public interest in giving their all to ensure the dynamic growth of the Credit Union. Her sister, Josephine Balderamos also worked at the HRCU in the early years.

It was during the tenure of the Presidency of Everal Waight that the Board of Directors introduced new financial regulations that included a yearly increment, gratuity as well as increases in salary across the board. The members of staff were loyal and the Board wanted to ensure that they did not look for greener pastures after being trained in the CU system of banking.

A remarkable show of faith in the members by Miss Jane was that she never ever wanted to write off loans. Quite often, circumstances proved her faith in members satisfied. There were times when a member who had long outstanding loan would walk into the office and ask to see Miss Jane. Ushered in the delinquent borrower would ask for a statement of his/her loan, including all the accumulated interest. Then, to Miss Jane's satisfaction, the errant member would pay it all up there and then. It was incidents like that which made work worthwhile. Jane never liked to lose a single member. She even encouraged members with a good credit record, who had left the country, to continue being members, to borrow wisely and to pay back promptly.

There is an old song which says "I know there'll never be another you." The training of staff by Henry and Jane has surely set HRCU on a firm footing.



(From left) Fr. Ganey, the late Henry Usher and Miss Jane

On April 25, 2001 HRCU presented Miss Jane its Golden Eagle Award at the 57th Annual General Meeting for her outstanding service to the Belize Credit Union Movement. Below are excerpts of a speech given by President Karl Menzies in announcing the award:

Although based on our credit Union financial year, we are celebrating our 57th AGM tonight, HRCU's actual completion of 57 years in existence is next month. We have been serving the people of Belize since May 1944.

On this grand occasion, some 32,423 members and \$143.3 million in assets later, your current Board of Directors has been seen it fit to establish a special Credit Union Award. An award of highest honor to be given to any individual, who has been outstanding in Credit Union week, and who has excelled in contributions to the Credit Union Movement in Belize. But exactly, who should we name the award after? What could we call this award?

A moment ago we paid homage to Miss Jane for her 45 years of distinguished service to HRCU and for her service to the Credit Union Movement throughout the entire Belizean nation. For this we presented her with a special "long service" crystal jade award together with a token gift on behalf of all members of HRCU. Miss Jane has been very dear to us. She has touched the lives of just abo every Belizean whether directly or indirectly. And because of this she has been so rightly called time after time, after time – the "mother" if the Credit Union Movement in Belize.

On the occasion of our 57th Anniversary celebration tonight. HRCU is choosing to establish this award of highest honor. This award will be issued for outstanding achievements and contributions, together with distinguished service in the Credit Union movement in Belize. Service way beyond the call of duty.



Miss Jane receiving the first Golden Eagle Award at the 57th AGM in 2001 from Dr. Marcelino Avila, C.E.O., Ministry of Cooperatives & Credit Union.

As a member of the Board of Directors of HRCU, I am indeed happy to inform everyone that on this day April 25, 2001, during the celebration of its 57th AGM. HRCU is establishing the Gold "Eagle Award" – a Credit Union Award of highest honor – name after none other than Henry Charles Usher, MBE.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that our first recipient of this Golden "Eagle Award" is someone, who was very dear to Henry Charles "Eagles" Usher. That person and the recipient of HRCU's first Golden "Eagle Award" is none other than our treasurer and General Manager of 45 consecutive years – Mrs. Jane Ellen Mary Usher, CBE, JP.