

Lawyer named Mississauga's top citizen

By: Amit Gossai
May 6, 2008 09:35 AM -

Bonnie Yagar spent 18 wonderful days on cruise ship visiting the likes of Peru and Chile before coming home to voice mail message that she couldn't believe.

Yagar, who has given a countless amount of volunteer hours into the Mississauga community, was named Citizen of the Year.

"We came home on Thursday and my husband was listening to the message and said 'Bonnie come over here, you have to listen to this,'" said Yagar. "I couldn't believe it.

"It's really overwhelming to be quite honest. I've had so many emails from various people, it just blows me away. I'm still trying to digest it."

The Lorne Park resident since 1983 had always been into volunteering starting off with little projects with her kids and school.

But Yagar said her move to Mississauga made it much easier to volunteer.

"While I was living in Toronto it was hard to identify with the community because of its size," she said. "Living in Mississauga, it's easier as an individual to participate in local events."

But it wasn't until she became a lawyer, that her volunteer contribution picked up.

"After I was called to the bar, I started volunteering on a much broader scale," said Yagar, a wills, trusts and estates lawyer at Pallett Valo law firm.

She received her Bachelors of Law at 43 from Western University and her Masters of Law from Osgoode Hall at 51.

"It's never too late to go back to school," said Yagar. "Having a law background has opened up so many doors for me. My input is really valued as a lawyer."

Yagar, who joined the board of Community Living Mississauga (CLM) in 1996, said she always wanted to make a difference and volunteering was the best way possible.

"I try to do as much as I can," said the past president of CLM. "I believe you can't take choices in life away from people just because they have a disability. You have to be able to respect peoples' needs and wishes if you want to improve their quality of life."

Yagar helped CLM receive a three-year accreditation and became founding chair of the rights committee, which allows the agency's developmentally challenged clients to bring forth concerns they have about the service they receive.

"Our main focus is that everyone is part of the community and everyone needs support in every way so they can be full citizens," said Yagar. "I'm strongly against institutionalizing people with intellectual disabilities."

Yagar's volunteer portfolio expands to include sitting on the donor development committee of Community Foundation of Mississauga, a Peel organization that would coordinate volunteers for various groups, director of Mississauga Homes for Independent Living, champion of the Success by 6 program that helps to ensure the healthy growth and development of young children and recently just agreed to assist the Canadian Mental Health Association.

"My schedule is very hectic with many meetings while still practicing law," said the 61 year-old Yagar. "But I don't think I've accomplished enough. But it is more than if I were to just sit down and twiddle my thumbs."

Citizen of the Year was not even on her mind said Yagar, who thanks her parents for her passion.

"The need and understanding that you have to contribute came from my parents," she said. "I'm fortunate to have the ability to do that and fortunate that people wanted my help."

Yagar, who loves to cook, sew, knit, spending time in the garden and of course construction, said she doesn't plan to stop volunteering anytime soon.

"I will always want to do more, it's just part of me," said Yagar. "I'm just a lawyer who does what she can, but at the end it feels really nice that someone else appreciates my hard work." onlinenews@mississauga.net



Mississauga lawyer Bonnie Yagar spends countless hours volunteering for Mississauga charities. For her efforts, Yagar has been named the city's Citizen of the