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City recognizes resident volunteers

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Bonnie Yagar may have come late to community volunteering, but she has made up for it with a vengeance. A Lorne Park resident since 1983, Yagar and her husband Joe raised three sons while she worked as a her local ratepayers' association and sat on school parent councils. However, it wasn't until she went to work for the City of Mississauga that Yagar's community contributions really blossomed.

Yagar was one of a number of community volunteers honoured last night at the Civic Centre during the evening.

Over 100 Mississauga residents, including 19 volunteers at Credit Valley Hospital, and local members of the Mississauga Synchronized Skating Club (Ice Precise masters and adult teams, Mississauga Motion novice and junior team, Dominators under 16s) and the Mississauga Mustangs Ringette team, were honoured.

Yagar, who joined the board of Community Living Mississauga (CLM) in 1996 as a member of its house committee, has been on the board ever since. Joanna Okolisan of CLM nominated the 61-year-old for the award on behalf of the group.

"Right from the beginning, Bonnie embraced the values and goals of Community Living and freely gave her time. She became board chair, helped get a rare three-year accreditation for CLM (there are just three in Canada), and served on a steering committee, which allows the agency's developmentally challenged clients to bring forth concerns they have. Her experience with CLM caused Yagar to question why Peel's social services are so badly-underfunded and she subsequently became chair of the Peel Fair Share Task Force which is lobbying for a better deal.

The Osgoode Hall graduate also sits on the United Way's planned giving committee, on the advisory committee of the champions committee of Success by Six, which supports individuals with mental health services.

Her crowded volunteer portfolio has recently been expanded to include sitting on the donor development committee of Mississauga and working with a steering committee that is working to re-establish — what else — the City of Mississauga's wills, trusts and estates lawyer says that she enjoys each of her volunteer experiences in different ways. CLM, however. "It's a wonderful cause to support," she says. "I've made great friends with the friendships with people who want to make a difference in their lives."

Despite her busy practice at the long-established Pallett Valo law firm in the city centre, Yagar is able to balance her professional and volunteer lives by "compartmentalizing" her time. "My family knows I won't be home until late on weeknights but I make time for my volunteer work. Yagar cooks, sews, makes most of her own clothes, knits and is an avid gardener both on her shady lot and in her community garden. The last thing she ever wants to do is volunteer just for the sake of it, she says. "I wouldn't do it if I didn't have to. I'm not going to meetings for the sake of going to meetings. I have to add value."

Okolisan ended her nomination submission by saying that Yagar, "is an enthusiastic, dedicated and independent volunteer whose commitment and the spectrum of work performed over the years demonstrates that Bonnie has truly served the community." jstewart@mississauga.net