

MARCH 19, 2008

Bonny Bonnie effort



When they handed out the Civic Awards of Recognition last night at City Hall to the individual (versus sports team) recipients, Bonnie Yagar was the last to be recognized, based on alphabetical logic. Based on civic contribution logic, she probably should have been first – with no disrespect meant to any of the other worthy people honoured.

Yagar has long been a volunteer, one who did the things any concerned mother would do while raising her three sons in Lorne Park, things like sitting on the local ratepayers' group and serving on the parent and school councils.

All that changed when the former law clerk decided to take a cue from the boss and went back to university to become a lawyer at age 43.

When she decided to start volunteering actively after she joined the venerable local law firm of Pallett Valo, founded by former MP and John Diefenbaker's Parliamentary Assistant John Pallett, she found a warm reception.

"I think they wanted to take advantage of my lawyer-brain," says the highly personable Yagar, who talks

to you as if she was leaning over her back fence, not as if she was addressing a judge, like many lawyers do.

No one is happier about her decision to take up volunteering as a pastime than Community Living Mississauga (CLM), which serves the many vulnerable people in the City who have an intellectual impairment.

"When I started looking at volunteering, I didn't even know what they did," laughs Yagar, who joined the housing committee 12 years ago and quickly became an invaluable member of the board, of which she is the former chair.

One volunteer post led to another, as it often does with committed people who have an understanding of the needs and a flair for advocacy.

Yagar became chair of Peel's Fair Share Task Force five years ago, reinvigorating the ongoing campaign for justice in funding for our region's under-nourished social services network.

It takes more energy to read through Yagar's list of volunteer positions than most of us have available to donate to a worthy cause in the first place.

As well as serving on the board of CLM, she is the chair of its rights committee, which allows clients a voice in their care.

She's on a Peel United Way committee and serves on PAR (Peel Activities and Recreation) which supports intellectually challenged individuals who are often left adrift after they must leave school.

Other involvements include Success by 6 and the Square One Older Adult Centre where she provides estate-planning seminars. She helps out parents of children who have developmental issues by providing estate seminars for Erinoak, CLM and Brampton Caledon Community Living.

Many aging parents of those with intellectual impairments have found solace in her critical advice about how their children can be cared for when they are gone.

With close to 20 hours a week donated to her various causes, Yagar must never see her family, right?

Well, no. She is so organized that she fits all of her volunteering into weekday evenings and then reserves her weekends for husband Joe and her sons.

She should probably be giving seminars on time management for the ultra-busy.

In case you're worried about her slacking off on weekends, she is an avid gardener at her Lorne Park home and at the cottage in Muskoka where there will be two new beds created this season for all of the perennials that need to be split.

She didn't get to Canada Blooms during March Break last week because she was at the Beads show in an adjoining part of the Metro Convention Centre. She makes jewellery.

She cooks and her sons are all good cooks. Often when she gets home late of a weekday evening, Joe, who doesn't cook, will ask if she has had anything to eat.

She recognizes this as an obvious plea for sustenance and heads for the kitchen to whip up a little something.

Bonnie knits on the way to the cottage so there's no time wasted in the car. Just so there's equal time committed to her masculine side, she drywalls and sets tiles.

She also loves to sew. Most of what she wears, including the jeans, she makes herself.

I can already hear you in the background whispering Peggy Lee's definitive version of *I'm a W-o-m-a-n* ("Can rub and scrub this old house til it's shinin like a dime/Feed the baby, grease the car, and powder my face at the same time/ Get all dressed up, go out and swing til 4 a.m. and then/Lay down at 5, jump up at 6, and start volunteerin' all over again.")

Whew.

In case she doesn't have enough on her plate, Yagar has recently expanded her horizons to sit on the donor development committee of the Community Foundation of Mississauga. Do you think a legal expert in estates might be slightly helpful there?

And she's on a steering committee to try to re-establish the sorely missed Volunteer Centre of Peel, another organization like the Community Foundation that is critical to the underpinnings of the entire social service network in the region.

"I can't tell you just how amazing she is," says Debbie Moffatt, director of quality and community development at CLM. "She just never ceases to amaze us."

Bonnie is the unofficial "tour guide" whenever CLM board and staff go away for a conference. To the point that when they went to Sault Lookout, Bonnie rented a car and chauffeured five women on a seven-hour drive to Winnipeg for some sight-seeing in the big city.

"She orchestrated it all," says Moffatt.

That seems to be a habit for Bonnie.

Can anyone say Citizen of the Year nominee?