

LOCAL NEWS

Celebration of People honours outstanding efforts

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Two west end individuals and one local festival were recognized recently for their outstanding work contributing to Ottawa residents living with disabilities.

Christine Murphy was awarded this year's Citizen of the Year award; Samuel Fulton received the volunteer award, and the Folk Festival was named recipient of the hospitality and tourism award in this year's doling out of the annual Celebration of People honours.

The awards are handed out each year to recognize residents and organizations who have contributed to their community and more specifically, contributed to the lives of Ottawa residents with disabilities.



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Christine Murphy received the Citizen of the Year award during December's Celebration of People honours.

Citizen of the Year award
Ms. Murphy, who lives with cerebral palsy, has fought through her disability to make a difference in the lives of others.

After earning a degree in psychology from Ottawa University in 1987, she found employment at the Ottawa Hospital Rehabilitation Centre on Smyth Rd. Her work has focused on helping women with disabilities fight back against abuse and violence.

"It was a group of about four women who knew about the topic of abuse and violence, or who personally experienced it," Ms. Murphy explained.

The group worked together from 1992-1996, she explained, but when funding from the then provincial Ministry of Social Services ran out there was nowhere left to turn.

While the group had been working with various service providers across the city and beyond to pair their information with social services available to the public, it became difficult to continue without funding.

"There was no money, no more funds that anybody had to incorporate our services with theirs," she said.

Since then, and for the last 12 years, Ms. Murphy has worked to adapt the program the group had delivered. Now on her own with the work, she said she is hoping to have the program adopted by commu-

nity colleges.

Ms. Murphy said her passion for sharing this information is rooted in her personal experiences, having fought through her disability to enjoy an independent lifestyle.

"Cerebral palsy is an awkward disability," she said, "and I can say that because I live with it."

One of the biggest challenges Ms. Murphy has faced is communication, but through persistence she is able to communicate effectively. For many people with the same disability, speaking is not possible; they communicate through pointing to symbols, or using other non-verbal techniques.

"I have a good brain and I needed to do something," Ms. Murphy said of what's driven her to achieve so much. "I couldn't just stay home and watch the soaps like many people believe we [do]."

Volunteer award

Sam Fulton, 64, has been working with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) for several years.

As a client of the institute himself, Mr. Fulton said he became a member of the now-defunct board of directors and remained a part of that for four years.

"From there, I sort of got

more out of the work he's done than he gives.

"You hear so many stories, you pick up so many new strategies related to sight loss," he said.

Getting a person to the place where they can feel comfortable joining the group is half the battle, he noted, and often requires several phone calls before that can happen. In many cases, Mr. Fulton said he's been required to talk with an individual for half an hour at a time before they can see the benefit that comes from a group session.

"When you first experience sight loss, you tend to go into yourself," he said. "You retreat."

Mr. Fulton said he was thrilled and very surprised to learn he'd earned this award.

"I was quite surprised because there are a lot of volunteers out there doing a lot of great work," he said.

On top of his involvement with the CNIB, Mr. Fulton volunteers his time with the Ottawa United Way.

"I've sort of got my fingers in two or three different areas," he said.

Now retired, Mr. Fulton said he has more time to devote to these volunteer activities and added he can't see himself giving it up for at least another 10 years.

"Once you've got the bug, it's hard to give it up," Mr. Fulton noted.

Of everything he's done,

he said the work with CNIB has been extremely rewarding.

"It's great to see the people who have lost their confidence and then their confidence comes back," he said.

Hospitality and Tourism award

Each year Ottawa's Folk Festival draws crowds from near and far to enjoy the summer weather and talented musicians who litter the grounds of Britannia Beach.

This year, the event will be open to even more residents, as festival staff have completed an accessibility audit of the grounds. For this effort, the Folk Festival received the Celebration of People's hospitality and tourism award.

Julia Adam developed the idea of conducting an audit through a conversation with one of the festival's volunteers last year. A student at Carleton University, the volunteer mentioned that the university had conducted a similar audit of their buildings. Ms. Adam said she decided that if a university could do it, so could the festival.

A group of volunteers, known as the A-Team, ventured through last year's festival to see how easy, or how difficult, it was to enjoy all there was on offer. As a result of the audit, Ms. Adam said there have been a few issues brought to light.

"It's discovered that on

the one hand, there is a reason why people with disabilities come to the festival," she said.

On the other hand, she noted, there was concern over the distance between the bus stop and the festival entrance. The audit also pointed out that unless a person with a disability had an able bodied person to accompany them, reading the menus in the food section of the festival was not possible.

"It's not just looking at the festival site," Ms. Adam noted. "It's from when you first connect with the festival."

The findings of the audit will be implemented into future festivals and Ms. Adam said she is hoping other festivals and events in the city will try out similar audits on their own.

Anyone looking for help to get an accessibility audit started can contact the Folk Festival main office at 613-230-8234.

Ms. Adam said she was very happy that the festival received the award.

"I've excited and surprised at the same time," she said. "I'm really grateful that we were even nominated."

The Celebration of People awards have been handed out each year in Ottawa since 2001 and are presented on Dec. 3, the day designated by the United Nations as International Day of Persons with Disabilities. Awards are presented in a range of categories.