

Citizen Advocacy brings buddies together

HEATHER BADENOCH
Special to Nepean
This Week

Greg Robillard has an

amazing memory.

He can name any Oscar winner and excels at music trivia.

His friend, Richard

Kastler, says not to doubt Greg. "Greg always gets it right. I've checked," he says.

To demonstrate, Richard asks, "Who won Best Actress in 1976?"

"Faye Dunaway in Network," Greg replies without hesitation.

"Best Supporting Actor 1981?"

"John Gielgud in Arthur."

"Best Picture 1964?"

"My Fair Lady."

Richard brags that Greg also excels at music trivia.

"Name Aerosmith's first record," says Richard.

"Aerosmith," comes the immediate reply.

Ok, easy one. "Name their third."

"Toys in the Attic." No hesitation. Greg knows this.

Richard is grateful for Greg's fantastic memory. "He reminds me about my anniversary and my wife's birthday every year."

The two friends laugh. "Please don't tell my wife!" pleads Richard (sorry, Richard).

The men get together regularly to see a movie, shoot pool, go bowling, or

relax at Richard's place. They did not meet the way most buddies do.

Greg and Richard met six years ago through Citizen Advocacy, a United Way agency that matches a volunteer with a person who has a disability. Greg says he was "lonely and isolated" before he was matched to Richard.

He was not working and did not get out much.

Greg was born in Kentville, N.S., was adopted, and came to Ottawa when he was still a baby. He has his own apartment, gets around mostly on his bicycle, collects vinyl records and likes old TV shows.

The Best of Van Morrison is playing in the background as he talks about waiting to be matched.

There were a lot of people ahead of him on the waiting list for a volunteer and he waited four years.

"I thought nobody wanted me," he says.

Richard heard about Citizen Advocacy on the radio and was interested because he could make his own schedule.

"I wanted to do something in my spare time," he says, "but needed it to be flexible".

Even with his life already full with work and family obligations, he enjoys his time with Greg and knows he's making a difference in Greg's life.

Richard is a manager at MBNA and lives in Craig Henry.

When asked about his hobbies, Richard laughs and replies, "working 60 hours a week and juggling a family". He's got a three-year-old son, and a baby girl on the way. His son wants to name his new sister "Bob".

Being matched to Richard boosted Greg's confidence almost immediately.

So much so that he boarded a bus to Toronto because he was curious about radio broadcasting. He succeeded in making a demo tape before coming home again.

More recently, Greg and Richard won the balloon toss game at Citizen Advocacy's annual barbecue.

"I'm not used to winning

things," says Greg.

Richard feels a sense of accomplishment in watching Greg grow.

Greg now has a full-time data entry job at Business Data Services, gets out more, and is able to foster new relationships.

Greg knows Richard is proud of him and says, "knowing I have at least one good friend helps me build self esteem".

Citizen Advocacy has been quietly matching people in the Ottawa community for 28 years.

Matches make their own schedule and get together three or four times a month for activities they both enjoy.

There is a long list of 100 men and women across Ottawa waiting for a volunteer, including 45 men and 10 women in Nepean.

Chances are Citizen Advocacy knows someone with a disability who shares your interests, and could use some practical assistance or friendship.

Call Citizen Advocacy at 761-9522, info@citizenadvocacy.org, or visit them at www.citizenadvocacy.org.