

Volunteer of the Year

November 2012

In 1999, the United Nations declared October 1st to be the International Day of Older Persons. Marked around the world under a different theme each year, in 2012 the title of the celebration was Longevity: Shaping the Future.

The Laurentian regional seniors' roundtables, one per MRC in the territory, each nominated a Volunteer of the Year and all of them were honoured at a ceremony held at the seniors' community centre, the Quartier 50+, in St. Jérôme on September 30 under the banner *Agir au lieu de réagir*, which translates as "Act rather than React."

For the MRC des Laurentides, the honouree was Grant MacKenzie, a bilingual Anglophone resident of Ste. Agathe. Former mayor Laurent Paquette describes Grant as "an involved citizen who is very generous with his time, continually thinking of others and is an excellent example of a well integrated member of the Anglophone community".

Grant attended Ste. Agathe High School (now Ste. Agathe Academy), and, because of his love of the outdoors, continued his education at UNB, graduating in Forestry in 1962. Following a career in the pulp and paper industry, he returned to the family home on Lac Brûlé in 2002.

Since then Grant has involved himself in a wide range of community groups, sharing his time and skills freely as a volunteer. He has been a town councillor since 2003 and is currently responsible for Public Security and the Environment. He sits on the board of the Laurentian regional environment council (CRE Laurentides), the Ste. Agathe Campground, the Laurentian Territory Natural Resources Commission (CRNTL), the waste management vigilance committee (RIDR – Regie Intermunicipal de Dechets de la Rouge), TerraVie (a community land trust), and the Lac Brûlé lake association.

As a member, he participates in the Catholic School Commission (CSL) environment committee, the Laurentian MRC Community Development Committee (CDCL) and the Accessibility Committee at CASA (Concert Action Soutien Autonomie des Laurentides – concerted action to support autonomy in the Laurentians), helping to set up regular networking opportunities for elected officials to get together with the groups and organizations providing services to seniors and to those losing their autonomy.

Publicly honouring volunteers is a way to bring attention to how citizens can get involved in their communities. Whether you have a little or a lot of time available, there are needs and opportunities within a broad range of organizations. Whatever your interests, there are certainly groups that can use your skills. It is not only the health and social services sector that relies on people giving their time in order to help their neighbours and friends. Social, cultural and recreational groups also require people power to keep going.

Grant feels that, while it is nice to be recognized for one's involvement, most volunteers do it for the personal satisfaction that comes from giving back to the community in quiet ways, knowing that one has made a difference in the lives of seniors or children, for those requiring palliative support or by coaching in a favourite sport, whether in schools, churches or hospitals.

Strong communities are made up of people working together for the common good, and Grant MacKenzie is a wonderful example for all of us.

-Sheila Eskenazi, President, English Communities Committee of the CSSS des Sommets
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