

City salutes its Local Heroes

Twenty volunteers named to the City of Burnaby's Local Heroes list for 2007

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Real heroes don't need capes, masks or superpowers.

Just ask the 20 volunteers that made this year's Local Heroes list, announced by Burnaby city council Nov. 5.

"The calibre of submissions was high," Basil Luksun, city planning director, said in staff report presented to council. "This year's Local Heroes represent a diversity of age groups, geographic areas in Burnaby and activity types."

- Jennifer Atchison: Atchison is a founding member of the Stoney Creek Environment Committee. In addition to researching stormwater management in the Stoney Creek Watershed, Atchison worked on the Burnaby Mountain watercourse and storm water management plan and worked to make designs for Burnaby Mountain Secondary School sensitive to the environment.

Her nominators called her "a hero who has a heart for nature and hands of nurture for the habitats and residents of Burnaby."

- Pushpa Cheema: Cheema has been Gilmore Community School's multicultural ambassador for the last five years. In that role, she welcomes new immigrants and helps them feel more comfortable. She's also chair of the school's multicultural committee and volunteers with the hot lunch program. Her nominators say she shows "outstanding dedication."

- Donna Dawson: Dawson has been volunteering in Burnaby for more than 45 years, including 21 years with Burnaby RCMP Victim Services. Dawson sits on the board of the Burnaby Restorative Action Group and is a community policing volunteer. "We cannot think of anyone more deserving of this award than Donna," her nominators said.

- Eman Elmasri: Elmasri, who came to Canada from Egypt nine years ago, is an active volunteer at the South Burnaby Neighbourhood House. She also helps organize a monthly multicultural event that promotes cross-cultural understanding among Burnaby residents. Elmasri is regularly called on to provide Arabic-English translation assistance for refugees.

- Barbara Harris: Harris, a retired teacher, was previously chair of the B.C. Teachers Credit Union Scholarship Foundation. She was also an organizer for the B.C. Games for the Physically Disabled, B.C. Summer Games and the Goldie Oldies World Hockey

Festival. Harris has been a coordinator of the Terry Fox Run at Swangard Stadium since 2004. Her nominators said, "on that Sunday morning in September, rain or shine, she makes everyone involved in the (Terry Fox) run feel like a Local Hero. ... It would be very fitting to have her officially named as one."

- Greg Harris: A former NASA engineer and schoolteacher, Harris volunteers with Tetra Society of North America, an organization that invents and builds devices to make life easier for people with disabilities. Harris designed and adapted an easel for local artist Art Jonker, which won a Tetra Quality of Life Award. He also designed a recorder for a local student that allowed the student to play the instrument.

Harris also shares his teaching and technological skills with local seniors, allowing them to use cellphones and other communication equipment. Nominators call him "Burnaby's ... very own rocket scientist, ... helping out Burnaby's residents, particularly people with disabilities and seniors."

- Jon and Mary Hernandez: Jon and Mary are volunteers at Nikkei seniors' home and Edmonds seniors' centre, spending at least two days each week volunteering. Since 2003, the pair has helped Nikkei residents with exercise programs, shopping, appointments and repairs. According to their nominators, "their hearts are huge; they ask for no thanks and shy away from recognition. ... They enrich the lives of everyone they meet and you cannot walk away without feeling touched by their kindness."

- Mary Horton: Horton volunteers with Bonsor Recreation Complex seniors' services, serving on several committees. She's also involved with Bonsor Seniors Society. Through her involvement with B.C. Hydro Power Pioneers, she has brought books to Maywood Elementary's library.

- Rainy Kent: Kent has been inspiring people in Burnaby to be engaged in physical activity. She volunteers to organize a five-kilometre run at Burnaby Lake, giving runners the chance to participate in an organized run prior to the Vancouver Sun Run. She also played a leadership role in organizing Burnaby's Sun Run training programs, Giro di Burnaby and Move for Health Day.

Her nominators said that "her smiling face, her encouraging words and whoops of joy kept us and many others going when we thought we couldn't."

- Rehman and Aly Lalji: Brothers Rehman and Aly, aged 14 and 11, have fundraised more than \$10,000 for the Ismaili Walk for Kids, which benefits the United Ways's Success by Six initiative. The pair has also raised \$25,000 for the World Partnership Walk, an initiative of the Aga Khan Foundation, which funds development work in some of the world's poorest countries.

- Elizabeth McEwan: McEwan has been a dedicated volunteer driver for the Lunch Bunch and Gadabouts programs, which provide recreation and social opportunities for seniors and people with disabilities. In addition, McEwan volunteers to drive people to

their doctors' appointments and helps them visit friends in the hospital. Since 2002, McEwan and her dog, Suzie, have been visiting patients at Burnaby Hospital.

- Wanda Mulholland: In 2004, Mulholland helped organize a group of service providers and members of Burnaby's faith community to form the Burnaby Task Force on Homelessness. She is also a volunteer at the Outreach Resource Centre, president of the Cariboo Hill Secondary school band parents' association and a Block Watch captain.

- Susan Papadionissiou: Papadionis-siou has spent 27 years working for the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Starting as the United Way planner for Burnaby, Papadionissiou later became director of agency and community services. She also sits on the Burnaby Board of Trade's non-profit task force and is a member of Burnaby's economic development strategy steering committee. Her nominators call her "a connector of people and services, a facilitator of discussion and problem solving, a catalyst for change."

- Patrice Pratt: As a parent of a disabled child, Pratt has been involved with the Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion for the past seven years. Pratt has also been involved with the United Way and has worked on Simon Fraser University's board of governors and given her time to the Simon Fraser University Foundation. Pratt's nominators say she brings "dynamism, passion and compassion" to her service.

- John Speckman: Speck-man volunteers four days a week - at a coffee house in Eastburn Community Centre, at Burnaby Hospi-tal's thrift shop and at his church. According to his nominators, Speckman's "strong work ethic, caring ways, enthusiasm, smile and gentle manner are much appreciated hallmarks of the way in which he supports people and organizations in his local Burnaby community."

- Pak-Kwan Tam and Chiu-Lin Tam: Pak-Kwan and Chiu-Lin have volunteered together for more than 10 years. The friends help with the Thursday night dance and Saturday meetings of the North Burnaby Retired Society. At Cameron Recreation Centre, they are involved with the computer club, social committee, curling and sing-along. Their nominators say they are "positive individuals whose involvement has benefited anyone who comes into contact with them."

- Margaret Widmer: Widmer is a longtime volunteer at Second Street Community School. For more than eight years, she has organized events like the Breakfast with Santa, Edmonds Santa Parade and Pioneer Tea. Widmer has also worked in the local community garden and volunteered her time to park development projects at Robert Burnaby Park.