

Quebec honour for Raeburn-Baynes

By RON FANFAIR



Gemma Raeburn-Baynes

A tireless volunteer and active fundraiser in Quebec's Black community has been honoured with a special award.

Grenadian-born Gemma Raeburn-Baynes was presented with the Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Award last Saturday night.

Established two years ago by the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), the award celebrates individuals who have gone above and beyond in contributing to the vitality and understanding of English-speaking Quebec.

"I am humbled by this award because I am standing on the shoulders of all my committee members, volunteers and supporters," said Raeburn-Baynes who helped start Montreal's Caribbean Carnival and founded the Play Mas Cultural Association which raises funds for sickle cell research. She also founded the now defunct Miss Black Quebec pageant and Montreal Ebony Models, the city's first Black modeling agency which generated almost \$1.5 million in a 27-year span through fashion shows. "It's because of their efforts that I am able to receive this wonderful award. I will cherish it forever."

Raeburn-Baynes, who migrated to Montreal in 1969, was one of three women to receive the award.

"Faced with sensationally well-qualified nominees, the jury had an impossible task," said QCGN past president and jury chair, Linda Leith. "The winners are all examples of people who are truly committed to their communities. We are delighted to be in a position to honour three remarkable women who have made a difference to the lives of English-speaking Quebecers.

"Throughout her various community commitments and contributions Raeburn-Baynes leads by example and bridges communities in Quebec by promoting tolerance and acceptance of people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds."

Victor Goldbloom was the first member of Quebec's Jewish community to serve in the provincial cabinet. That was in the Liberal government of Premier Robert Bourassa. He and his wife are one of the few couples to receive both the Order of Canada and National Order of Quebec.

Raeburn-Baynes, a Bank of Montreal Financial Group's senior auditor and McGill University graduate, initiated the Trans Canadian Possibilities Internship Scholarship for visible minority and Aboriginal youth and young people with disabilities. She also created "The Taste of the Caribbean" festival 12 years ago that showcases the Caribbean's rich culture, craft and tasty culinary delights, and sits on several boards.

Last February, she was the recipient of the Grenada Consul General Award at the Grenada Association of Toronto's annual awards dinner to celebrate the island's 37th independence anniversary.

In July 2008, the Human Rights Commission ordered the Montreal police to pay the Dollard-des-Ormeaux resident, who suffers from congestive heart failure, \$20,000 for racial discrimination.

The commission ruled that police officers made racist remarks in a 2004 incident in which they drew guns on Raeburn-Baynes and two Grenadian-born friends helping to clear out her garage. A neighbour called 911 after spotting the trio, believing a robbery was in progress. Police arrived with guns drawn and when Raeburn-Baynes protested, an officer replied that "bullets don't see colour." Another officer told one of the men that if he didn't like it here, he should go back to his own country.

The city settled with the plaintiffs.

<http://www.sharenews.com/local-news/2011/10/27/quebec-honour-raeburn-baynes>