

Service and community

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Anglophone community leaders from across Quebec gathered in Montreal on Oct. 22 to honour the 2011 winners of the Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Awards. The awards, given by the Quebec Community Groups Network, an umbrella organization for anglophone community groups across the province, are named for a couple well-known for their own community service: Victor Goldbloom has served as an MNA, head of the Canadian Council of Christians and Jews, and federal official-languages commissioner, while Sheila Goldbloom is a professor of social work, founding board member of the Foundation of Greater Montreal, and in 2008 was co-chair of a provincial commission on the living conditions of Quebec seniors. Both have a long history of charitable and volunteer work. The three winners of the 2011 Goldbloom awards recently spoke to The Gazette's communities editor, David Johnston, about their own work.

ALINE VISSER

Visser was born in Farnham of Lebanese immigrant parents. After graduating from Bishop's University in Lennoxville in 1957, she took a teaching position in Thetford Mines - where she has lived ever since. She worked for 35 years as a teacher before retiring in 1992 to devote more time to a broad range of community activities. Visser, 74, is the current chair of the board of directors of the Centre de santé et de services sociaux de la région de Thetford. Since 1993 she has been a school commissioner with the Central Quebec School Board. She is also a founding member of the Mégantic English-speaking Community Development Corporation, which serves the anglophone population of the Chaudière-Appalaches and L'Érable regions.

Gazette: What is it like today for a small Englishspeaking community in an otherwise overwhelmingly francophone region?

Visser: When I first came to Thetford Mines, it was a busy mining town and there were lots of people whose first language was not French - there were Greeks, Czechs, Russians and so on. But with the nationalization of the mines in 1976, a lot of people moved away. The English-speakers had the top jobs and the changes in 1976 did a bit of a number on the English-speaking community here. It was strange for our community for a while, but now I find that there is a certain pride in the French-speaking community that Thetford still has an English-speaking school. When it comes to health issues or other issues where anglophones might have special needs, we find the attitude of the francophone community is very generous.

Gazette: Can you give an example?

Visser: There was this one English-speaking gentleman from this area. He grew up here and he learned French, then moved away, then came back, then was transferred to Montreal, then came back after his retirement. And then he got Alzheimer's disease. As the disease progressed, he lost his French and was left with his mother tongue, English. And so when the time came for placement in a home, he had special needs when it came to language. The staff where he was placed were very good; if they weren't able to meet those needs, they were willing to work with someone who could. It ended up that the CSSS de la région de Thetford and the man's family were able to arrange private care for the man. The family paid for the private care and the CSSS made sure the private caregiver could be worked into the public network.

JOAN IVORY

Ivory, 78, was born in Montreal. She spent the six years of the Second World War as an elementary-school student at The Study, a private girls' school. She graduated from McGill University with a Bachelor of Arts in 1954. Ivory has a long history of volunteer work going back to 1953, mainly in the health field but also in education and the arts. She is currently a member of a McGill University Health Centre subcommittee for quality assurance and risk management. She is also on the board of directors of the Public Television Association of Quebec, the Canadian fundraising arm of Vermont Public Television.

Gazette: What makes for a good volunteer?

Ivory: It works both ways with volunteers. A good volunteer has to be willing to take direction, and do the job they are assigned to do by the organization they have volunteered to help. You can't go in with your own agenda. At the same time, people directing volunteers need to have a sense of volunteer sensitivity. Because sometimes you get

GEMMA RAEBURN-BAYNES

Raeburn-Baynes, 61, was born in Grenada and came to Canada in 1964. She is a senior auditor with the Bank of Montreal, where she has worked since 1973. Throughout the 1990s, she spearheaded policies at the bank to improve advancement opportunities for women and visible minorities. She has also been active in local and international charitable activities. She has founded several non-profit organizations within Montreal's black community and the city's anglophone community more generally. She is founder of A Taste of the Caribbean, an annual Montreal food festival that raises money for culinary scholarships for English-speaking youth.

Gazette: During your acceptance speech for your Goldbloom award, you thanked a lot of people. This suggests your career has been marked by some very important personal and professional relationships. Does this speak more generally to the importance of networks, of networking, in business?

Raeburn-Baynes: I am not an island. I can't do everything myself. Networks are very important. Along the way, a lot of people have introduced me to a lot of other people. I wouldn't have been as successful as I have been if it wasn't for other people. Anything you do, you don't do alone. That's why I quoted Desmond Tutu in my speech, saying, "If I am standing tall before you tonight, it is because I am standing on the shoulders of all of the people who have supported me through the years."

Gazette: You did a lot of work in the 1990s on affirmative action, as it is called in the United States, or employment equity, as it is called in Canada. And yet we don't hear very much anymore about programs that actively encourage the promotion of women and visible minorities. Has there been a bit of a backlash? Do we not care as much about gender and minority representation?

Raeburn-Baynes: I wouldn't say that. The programs are still there, but the focus is more on gender equality and promotion of diversity. It's not as hurrah-hurrah anymore. Women have been making good strides. The executive ranks used to be mainly male. Now it's about one-third women, I think. And significant changes have been made in terms of the advancement of visible minorities too, although there is very much more to be done in this area. It's not that these advancement programs no longer exist, or that people don't care. It is just less emphasis is placed on the work being done due to budget cuts, which has had an impact on organizations.

volunteers who are more knowledgeable than the people who are directing them. Everybody has to remember what they are there for.

Gazette: Montreal has changed a lot since your school years from the late 1930s to the early 1950s. As an anglophone, how do you feel about Montreal today?

Ivory: Oh, I just think this is the most exciting city in the world. Every time I come back to Montreal on a plane, I think about how I'm so lucky to live here. Somebody told me something, a current joke: In Toronto, if you are at a cocktail party, the men are all in one room together, talking about how much money and square feet they have, while the women are in a separate room, talking about, well, whatever they are talking about. At that same cocktail party in Montreal, the men and the women tend to be in the same room together, talking about politics or the economy or whatever - but most of all, talking in a really upbeat way, even when times are down. If there is one great attribute about Montreal, it is that every single person in the city is a member of one sort of minority group or other. What that means is that they are aware that there is always another side to the story, whatever that story is. Think about that.

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