

# **‘It takes an army of women to be this successful’**

**Founder Debbie Rathwell was awarded the community building and volunteerism award**



**Debbie Rathwell PHOTO: NADINE YOUSIF/TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL**

When Debbie Rathwell stood up to accept her award for community building and volunteerism at this year’s YWCA Women in Distinction gala, she did so on behalf of more than 250 women.

Rathwell is the founder of the Saint John chapter of the One Hundred Women Who Care. The organization, which has had a high of 280 members during its four-year run, brings together women from Greater Saint John under the united goal of raising money for local charities.

“The concept is so simple because you gather women four times a year for an hour each, and they each contribute \$100,” Rathwell said. “ ... Women that are members have the opportunity to nominate a local charity. I do the draw and I choose out of the hat.”

The charities then give a five-minute presentation to the members, and a vote is then held for which charity the money will go to, Rathwell said. The women then write their cheques and the winning charity receives the money at the meeting. Since the first meeting in June 2013, the Saint John organization was able to raise \$390,000 for charity. Rathwell said the women are expected to hit the \$400,000 milestone in the upcoming week.

“It’s a means to bring people together to do good, and give up very big lump sums of money to a very worthy charity,” Rathwell said, adding the organization is “efficient, effective, and immediate.”

Rathwell was inspired to start the Saint John chapter of One Hundred Women Who Care after attending a conference in Fredericton, where the co-founder of the Halifax chapter was giving a talk.

"It just went straight to my heart," Rathwell said. " ... I was just like, oh my god, if I am so attached to this already, there's got to be at least 100 other women in my community that feel the same way."

Finding women to join wasn't difficult, Rathwell said, with 50 signing up within the first three hours. The organization's first meeting boasted 186 members, and the number hasn't been lower since. Rathwell, who owns a corporate planning company called Red, said winning the YWCA award this year for her charity work made her feel "so proud."

"My life has felt so much more purposeful since I've started this and being able to accept that on behalf of all of the women, I just felt so proud and accomplished," she said.