

City recognizes community builders in civic awards ceremony



Eight organizations and individuals were recognized in Saint John's annual Civic Recognition Awards Ceremony on Monday, including the Human Development Council; 100 Women Who Care; Sistema NB Saint John Centre; Mary Lesage of PULSE; Herb Doughty; Dr. Mike Simon. Gary Brown Sr. and Rev. Jasmine Chandra.

Photo: Emma McPhee/Telegraph-Journal

SAINT JOHN • Saint John council recognized eight individuals and organizations in its annual civic awards ceremony on Monday.

The awards were in recognition of "the incredible achievements of our fellow citizens who have gone above and beyond to make our community a better place," said Saint John Mayor Donna Reardon, to a group gathered that included musicians, an engineer, a doctor, a priest and other community builders.

Council awarded the "Citizen of the Year Award" to the organizations 100 Women Who Care Greater Saint John, Sistema NB Saint John Centre and the Human Development Council.

Accepting the award on behalf of the Human Development Council, executive director Randy Hatfield said the organization has been operating in Saint John for 42 years, tackling issues like homelessness, youth employment and organizing initiatives like Civic Tech and the Around The Block community newspaper.

"We're not the front line, but close," Hatfield said. "We stand on the shoulders of the community's front line."

Hatfield peppered his remarks with stats from Sunday, in which the Romero House soup kitchen served 430 meals and 38 people sought shelter at one of the city's two emergency shelters, of which 10 per cent were seniors and 8 per cent were youth 24 and under.

"We have big city problems in a small city," Hatfield said, adding he was encouraged to see the city stepping up to play a larger role in addressing social issues.

100 Women Who Care, which began 10 years ago with a goal of having 100 women meet four times a year to donate \$100 each to a chosen cause, is now 306 women strong and has surpassed the \$1 million donation threshold, said co-founder Debbie Rathwell, who accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

"It's given me a true feeling of purpose, accomplishment and contribution to my community," Rathwell said. "My life is richer because of the incredible heights we have achieved and not to mention all the great women friends."

Rachel Kidd, director of the Sistema NB Saint John Centre, which provides orchestral instrument instruction to area children, said the program now serves 200 children in its daily program and 60 youth in its youth orchestra with 17 teachers.

"We are a social program that uses music as a tool for social change," Kidd said. "The idea is that kids come to use and they have a specific goal to get better at music, and they work on that really hard every day. And when they come to us, they see that their effort is rewarded with results of being able to play beautiful music, and we feel that that has a social impact that carries throughout their whole lives."

A total of five individuals received council commendations on Monday, nominated by individual councillors.

Mary Lesage was recognized for her work with PULSE, an organization that serves the south end neighbourhood.

"Through her role in leading PULSE, Mary helps with taxes, she runs a food purchasing club and runs a community food pantry and service navigation," said Coun. David Hickey. "But, above all, to me, Mary is a community builder in the south end. She's a role model for resilience, tenacity and leadership, whether in her own life or in leading PULSE."

Coun. Gary Sullivan introduced Herb Doughty as a fixture at city hall since the tower opened in 1971, first as chief engineer and building manager, and now helping out the Fundy Harbour Group.

"Herb's skills and knowledge have been essential to successive building owners," Sullivan said. "His enthusiasm, competency, reliability and warm smile are valued by everyone here at City Hall."

Dr. Mike Simon received his award for his service to Saint John in the medical profession now 33 years and counting, as well as for his extensive volunteering.

"Outside the medical field, Mike is a longtime, I would say, a serial volunteer," said Coun. Greg Norton, adding Simon has been a "supporter of youth sports right across our region," and has been a board member of the Greater Saint John Community Foundation for a decade.

Gary Brown Sr. received recognition for his work with the All Ears Outreach Campaign, Operation White Heart and the Giant Steps Wellness Park in Crescent Valley.

"His efforts have raised awareness for mental health, suicide prevention, and his white hearts can be found in many locations in Saint John and across the province," said Coun. Barry Ogden.

Rev. Jasmine Chandra of Stone Church also received a council commendation for her work as an "advocate for people living on the margins" in the south central peninsula.

"Her work is supportive of those who face food insecurity, homelessness, and she continues to support and advocate for people living on the margins," said Coun. Brent Harris.