

Diane Buchanan named Aurora's Citizen of the Year



By Brock Weir

Long-time volunteer Diane Buchanan says she was 'shocked' before being moved to tears upon being named Aurora's Citizen of the Year this week.

Ms. Buchanan, who was born in Oak Ridges before moving to Aurora in her teens, was honoured with the appointment by Mayor Geoff Dawe and Council at Monday's Community Recognition Awards ceremony, held at the Aurora Seniors' Centre.

Unable to attend this week's ceremony due to a long-standing previous commitment, Ms. Buchanan will be feted at Council on June 9, but through special arrangement with the Mayor's Office, was presented with the award by over 10 friends on Saturday night, many of whom put her name forward for the honour.

'I cried and just stood there in complete shock,' Ms. Buchanan told The Auroran. 'It was like, 'What are you girls talking about?' I had no idea.'

Her travelling companions, she says, began reading out letters they submitted to the Town on her behalf, but it was not until the third letter in that being Citizen of the Year finally sunk in.

'I was overwhelmed and I didn't believe it. They kept looking at me saying, 'Yes, it's true' and I kept saying, 'No, it's not.' I thought they were pulling my leg, but this is a very serious thing for them to be pulling my leg about! Then I thought, 'Did I really do all those things the letters said I did?' I guess I did, but you never do any of these things hoping you are going to become Citizen of the Year or anything else. You do it because you love to do it.'

Ms. Buchanan's life as an active volunteer stretches back more than 50 years, becoming an active parent involved in the communities of Wells Street Public School, Aurora Senior Public School, as well as Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School where

she herself was a student. Community service inevitably followed when the younger of her two daughters became involved with the Aurora Diggers softball team, where she became very involved in the operations of the team, earning the name "Mother B" among the girls.

Her reputation as "Mother B", a moniker she proudly bears on her license plate today, spread to the hockey arena when her son became involved in the sport and she ultimately decided to become a founding member of the Aurora Ladies Softball League, where she played and coached for over 30 years.

"I loved the sports," she says. "I loved the fact I could make a difference with the way the programs were being run and it just made me feel I was accomplishing something."

Outside of the ball diamond, Ms. Buchanan's volunteer interests turned to supporting Dr. G.W. Williams, becoming an active member and proponent of the Aurora branch of the Royal Canadian Legion, and particularly to the Optimist Club of Aurora, the local service organization devoted to being "a friend to youth."

Her relationship with the club began over 10 years ago from a chance encounter at an area golf tournament, a sport which dominates her passion today. Approached to join the club, the more its role was explained to her, the more she felt it was a perfect fit for her.

Club President Kimberley Kerr says Ms. Buchanan devotes "countless hours a year" to the cause in a variety of capacities, including working with the Aurora Chamber of Commerce on their annual Home Show, working closely with the Town of Aurora on their Canada Day and Santa Under the Stars Parades, and, through the club, raising awareness of other community organizations worthy of attention. In fact, Ms. Kerr credits Ms. Buchanan with bringing her into the Optimist fold herself.

"I knew the Optimist Club was a perfect fit right from Day One because it was supporting the youth of Aurora," says Ms. Buchanan. "We sponsor with the York Regional Police the Eco Trip where they take students who are at risk and put them through a six month re-establishing program where police mentor these at-risk youth. That, I think, has probably been the most awesome thing we have done."

But, more awesome things could be in the offing. Now that she has been named Citizen of the Year, Ms. Buchanan says there is a feeling that she better "step it up a little bit" in terms of her volunteer efforts. In fact, part of her regular duties at events such as the Canada Day and Santa Under the Stars parades, included driving the Citizen of the Year down the parade ground while he or she judged each float. Now, someone else is going to have to be in the driver's seat for the year ahead.

"I can't believe this is happening," she says. "I just can't believe I am going to be sitting on the other side of that golf cart. I know I have big shoes to fill after [2014 Honouree] Beverley Wood, but I never had any perception this was in the cards. Volunteering is very, very, very rewarding. You may not notice it at the time of doing it, but down the road, it becomes clear when you see these kids surfacing as responsible adults."