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Sask *Culture*



Volunteers help underserved in Saskatoon

Volunteerism a strong connector in the Ukrainian community



RIVERS WEST DISTRICT VOLUNTEER AWARDS Connect at a Personal Level

BY ANA CRISTINA CAMACHO

After decades of celebrating volunteers at an annual in-person banquet, organizers realized that a personal thank-you and award delivery was much more successful.

When COVID hit, Bonnie Mills Midgley and Cynthia Tymoruski, both community development coordinators at the Rivers West District for Sport, Culture and Recreation, were forced to end a 30-year tradition of thanking volunteers at an in-person banquet as part of its Volunteer Recognition Program Awards. While the

District organizers mailed out the awards in 2020, Tymoruski and Mills Midgley started taking the celebration to the recipients' communities over the past two years. In 2021, they delivered them one-on-one, and by 2022, they were distributing the awards in person at several smaller events across the region.

"It's something we're going to do again this year, because it seems to be so much more successful," Tymoruski says. "We get to be there and be part of that whole experience."

For their 2022 awards, Tymoruski and Mills Midgley toured the District and met the award winners at their own volunteer banquets or events, or simply for a small lunch or outing. Mills Midgley says that celebrating volunteers in front of the community is an important way of recognizing their contributions.

"No volunteer does what they do for personal glory or anything like that. They do it because they're helping members of the community, or they're helping the community in general to be a better



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place,” Mills Midgley says. “In turn, when they get the thank you, and a small token that they can hang on their wall or take home, it just recognizes what they're doing — and that little bit of recognition goes a long way.”

Mills Midgley recalls one occasion where she drove to a 4-H year-end banquet in Hillmond to meet with Over-All Volunteer winners Julie Hougham and Katie Clark. While before only the volunteers and one or two family members would typically attend the awards banquet, she says that celebrating Hougham and Clark in front of their families, 4-H members, students and the community, made it more special.

“We went to their year-end banquet and gave them the awards, not only in front of the adults, but also the youth, so they could see their 4-H Leader and teacher being recognized,” Mills Midgley says. “I think that was important — that the youth get to see the person that helps them with their project or their teacher or their coach or their manager, getting an award, and the whole community gets to clap and cheer and congratulate them.”

Aside from community events, the Rivers West Team now also shines a spotlight on the District's volunteers on social media. “The person is in the limelight for a week, and then that picture stays somewhere,

and people can go back and see it,” Mills Midgley says. “It gives the award winners further recognition.”

According to Tymoruski, volunteering has a huge impact on communities, the individuals that volunteer and those involved should be recognized.

Rivers West District for Sport, Culture and Recreation operates thanks to funding from Sask Lotteries Trust Fund for Sport, Culture and Recreation.

Volunteers across the province receive annual recognition and a personal visit from the Rivers West District.

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