

Guyanese women honored for volunteering

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(CARIBBEAN CAMERA- TORONTO 2011-04-25) Two women who have reserved Saturdays on their calendars to spend unpaid and quality time with seniors for almost 40 years have been recognized for their selfless work by MPP for Don Valley West, Kathleen Wynne.

Recently, Wynne who is also Ontario's Transportation Minister handed out Volunteer Service Awards to 22 community volunteers, among them were the two Guyana-born women, **Joyce Tadege and Yvonne Lopes**.

Both women have been volunteering as members of the Senior Guyanese Friendship Association, which serves over 300 Guyanese and non-Guyanese seniors (men and women) in the community. Tadege is a founding member of the association and has been serving for the past 30 years while Lopes has been associated with it for 37 years. They both served in various capacities including as the secretary, vice-president and activities coordinator. They also play an active role in events organized by the Guyana Consulate in Toronto.

"It was a complete surprise, I didn't expect it. Raymond Peter (a supervisor at the centre for the Parks and Recreation) called and told me that he had sent my name in and I was accepted for the award," said Tadege told the Camera.

Yvonne Lopes on the other hand said the award is very much appreciative. "I am very proud to get it. I didn't expect something like that. I expected just a piece of paper. It was framed; I really did not expect it."

Both women strongly believe that volunteering makes a difference in one's life and the lives of others as it allows you to network and broaden your knowledge and skills.

The association grew from being a little club which comprised parents of young Guyanese mothers who came to Canada to assist with their grandchildren. "All they were doing were looking after the children and going to church on Sundays and we wanted them to have something different, so we started a sort of a club," Tadege added. After a few years, the registered association was formed in 1973 and has since grown over the years to cater for any senior, regardless of country of origin, who wants to socialize with others on a Saturday afternoon.

Members are involved in making handicrafts, choir singing as well as fund raising activities and special events.

“There are many community organizations in Don Valley West that wouldn’t be able to offer their services without the time and effort of these volunteers,” said Kathleen Wynne. “I am grateful to each of the award winners for their selfless work and I am proud to celebrate them at my Volunteer Service Awards.”

She told the Camera that the awards ceremony started last year to honour people in the community who had been involved in volunteering in sport activities as it was the Olympics. “However, there were enquiries about nominating people who have been volunteering in community activities; hence a decision was made to recognize the work of people involved in both sport and community activities.

“What we did is that we asked folks in the community to nominate people who they knew very well. So the people who get the awards, they are not often people that I know very well but the nominators know them very well and they make the case. So for Joyce and Yvonne, I have met them a number of times because they run the Guyanese Seniors events at the Dennis Timbrell Centre, so I was aware of them and I think it’s a terrific organization and I was very happy that they were nominated