



Joanne Lancaster (seated) receiving her Honouree of the Year certificate from Branch 92 Legion President Cliff Weir and Councillor Anne Warren on New Year's Day in Gananoque

Gananoque's Joanne Lancaster looks pretty much the way you'd expect a retired teacher to look. Small, pleasant, twinkling eyes, great smile, an all around nice person. But she's hiding a great secret right out in the open.

In January, she was the Branch 92 Royal Canadian Legion's Honouree of the year.

They recognized her as:

- President of the Gananoque Rotary Club
- President of the local Food Bank
- Head of the Gananoque RibFest
- Recipient of the 2014 Paul Harris Award
- President of the Carveth Care Auxiliary
- Volunteer at Carveth Care
- Canada Day Children's activities volunteer
- Volunteer at the Lansdowne Fair
- Volunteer usher at the Thousand Islands Playhouse
- Assists with the 50/50 draw at the Firehall Theatre
- Volunteer and canvasser for the Heart and Stroke Society
- Volunteers and works for the Salvation Army in Gananoque
- Co-ordinate's the annual Kettle Campaign for the local Salvation Army
- Volunteers and canvasses for the Canadian Cancer Society

When her name was announced by Ken Stewart at the Legion, she was stunned.

"I just can't believe it," she said. "Volunteering is not really time consuming. Anyone with some time to spare might enjoy one of the many opportunities to volunteer. It's rewarding, it's fun and you meet a lot of interesting, kind people."

Raised and educated in Toronto, she went on to a rewarding career as a teacher. In 1977, she moved to this area to pursue a business, and then in 1980 found herself teaching for a year at Linklater PS in Gananoque. This was followed by three years at Boundary PS in Prescott, and finally moving on to Sweet's Corners in Lyndhurst.

"For me, teaching was an amazing, super rewarding job – enjoyable, fun, and always different experiences, situations, and children – a profession where money is (an added bonus for what you love to do)," she said.

JOANNE LANCASTER

Gananoque's RCL Honouree of the Year

By Lorraine Payette



Top: Joanne Lancaster (second from right, standing) donating Child Identification Packets to students at Sweet's Corners Public School in her position as Rotary President; **Top Left:** Joanne Lancaster, volunteer extraordinaire; **Top Right:** Joanne Lancaster (fourth from left, standing) working to bring in the collection at the Gananoque Food Bank's annual Harvest Drive

She retired after that to look after her grandchild. She couldn't stand being idle, so she found ways to stay busy.

"I took my granddaughter to every event, class, group or whatever, for fun things to pursue," she said.

At the time there was an early childhood group at the Salvation Army where they frequented.

Getting to know the people convinced her to volunteer, and without realizing it, she had opened a new chapter in her life.

"I became a volunteer with (them) and have been there ever since. When they required a volunteer to co-ordinate the kettle campaign in 2009, I decided I could do it."

She has sat with the kettle, helped distribute snow suits, and assisted with the hot lunch campaign at the Army. This was the start, and it wasn't long before she found other places in need of her help.

Soon she was giving time to the Rotary, then Carveth Care, then the Playhouse, then... Every time she turned around she saw someone or something that needed just a

little bit of help, that extra push to make things better.

"My family is supportive of the volunteering," said Lancaster. "They know I'm not one to sit and read or pursue housework. My family, of course, always comes first. If they need me, I'm there. As a volunteer, there has never been a conflict. It's easy to do.

"The Playhouse is only open May to October and my schedule might be twice a month. The Salvation Army kettle campaign is only November/December. Rotary is every Tuesday. Maybe it sounds like a lot, but I figure there are at least thirty days in the month – it's nice to keep busy. Who knows? Maybe one day I will be in a situation where I will appreciate having someone volunteer to help me..." LH