

LOCAL NEWS

County honours super-Sheehans

Villeneuve couple becomes county's first Volunteers of the Year

BY KEVIN MA APR 25, 2012

A Villeneuve couple has become Sturgeon County's first-ever Volunteers of the Year.

Pat and Simonne Sheehan received Sturgeon County's first Outstanding Volunteer of the Year award Tuesday night at the county's annual volunteer appreciation dinner. Appropriately, the ceremony was held at Villeneuve Hall, a place their volunteer efforts helped to build.

The Sheehans have spent decades volunteering for local teams and churches and were instrumental in the construction of Villeneuve's church, community hall, and assisted living centre (West Country Hearth), said Coun. Tom Flynn, who has known them for about 40 years.

"They've donated hundreds and hundreds of hours to these facilities in any way that's needed."

Whether it's pushing a broom or taking the lead, no task is too great or too small for this couple, said Terry Cashin, the county's community services manager. "We feel they epitomize the value that senior citizens can bring to their community."

Pat and Simonne, who are in their 80s, credited their 27 grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren for giving them the gumption to get out and volunteer.

It gives you a reason to get up in the morning, Simonne added. "You meet the best people when you volunteer."

Community cornerstones

The county has recognized volunteer groups in the past, Cashin said, but decided this year to also crown an individual as volunteer of the year. Nine people, ranging in age from 15 to 84, were nominated by the community.

The Sheehans first moved to Villeneuve about 1964, Pat said, back when it had a population of about "50 girls and four boys," he joked. He helped run a farm equipment shop in town before moving on to the Case dealership in Morinville.

The two of them started volunteering in town by helping to build the community hall in the mid-60s, Simonne said. "I was phoning for workers," and Pat was hammering boards.

It was something the community needed, she explained, and everyone chipped in to build it. "When you see what you've accomplished, it's quite rewarding."

The Sheehans were also central figures in the construction of Villeneuve's assisted living facility, West Country Hearth, said Colleen Soetaert, chair of the West Sturgeon Aging in Place Foundation and one of their seven children. "Mom was my volunteer co-ordinator," she recalled, and had a half-inch thick book of contacts ready whenever they needed help. Pat was at the construction site every day, hauling supplies, cleaning up and hanging shower curtains.

They might not be climbing ladders to shingle roofs anymore, Flynn said, but the Sheehans are still very active in their community. "If you come to one of the events at the [Villeneuve] Hall ... they'll always be here."

They've also passed this dedication onto their children, many of who have long records of community service.

It's nice to see the kids stepping up as volunteers, Simonne said. "Now that we're in our 80s, it's their turn."