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Lois Hodgins sees 'Red' when she's 'Cross'.
As community services co-ordinator for the Red Cross, Quinte Branch, she goes from one disaster to another, helping to arrange succour for victims of earthquakes, drought, terrorist attacks (see 9/11 New York) and tsunamis.

That makes her a good neighbour, but she considers herself just another face in the crowd.

"I don't know how interesting I am ...," she said when a reporter arrives to do an interview at the Red Cross office in the south McNabb Towers in downtown Belleville.

Immediately afterward, she reveals an interesting fact.

"I was born in the Red Cross hospital in Bancroft," Hodgins revealed. The year was 1952. The hospital was closed when a new facility was opened in 2002.

Hodgins had an uncle who owned a farm in Prince Edward County and it was there, during summers, that she got her "first backache loading hay wagons."

After graduation from that venerable institution in Bancroft, North Hastings High School, Hodgins was off to Toronto where she landed a job with a publishing house.

But she was destined to return to Hastings County, albeit the southern part. After marrying Brian 34 years ago, he said they were not going to live in the Big Smoke and he landed a job in Belleville with Exxonmobil.

Lois left the working world to be a stay-at-home mom to Scott and Heather, but in 1988 she re-entered the workplace as an insurance broker.

But after a decade-and-a-half, Hodgins was looking for new territory to conquer.

"I felt at this time of life, I needed a change of pace."

A year ago, she was talking with friend Kay Manderville and the latter said she had the qualities to be a linchpin in a non-profit organization.

"She was the one who led me," Hodgins remembered, laughing.

Hodgins saw an advertisement in The Intelligencer for a Red Cross co-ordinator, decided to apply and began with the organization July 24, 2004. The office was tucked away in the Bell Tower Plaza on North Front Street. It was hard to find and Hodgins convinced the powers-that-be that a more visible location would benefit the non-profit charity.

As things turned out, she was right. More people come in with donations to the new office, and it is easier to find for those who wish to enrol in Red Cross programs, like the Aug. 24 first aid seminar for seniors.

It is also more accessible for squirrels, who constantly try to come in through the office door, she said, smiling.

While Hodgins has returned to her

Hodgins, Lois

Hastings County, the Red Cross has returned to what it does best.

After the tainted blood scandal, the organization has looked to disaster and emergency planning and training.

"We went back to our roots."

The tsunami disaster in December gave the Red Cross a chance to shine, and the main warehouse for the national tsunami relief effort is located in Belleville. Officials from Red Cross, the Canadian International Development Agency and the Department of National Defence were slated to tour the warehouse this past week.

The warehouse has provided hundreds of tons for items for the tsunami relief effort — the materials are flown out of CFB Trenton. Right now, it is chalked full of pails, jerry cans and water cleansing tablets.

And speaking of relief, there is another component to the Red Cross called the Red Crescent. Zeddy the Bear — he is given to children in time of disaster — in the accompanying photo, has the Red Crescent in his left paw. Muslim countries equate the Red Cross on white background as a Christian symbol, Hodgins said, used during the Crusades 10 centuries ago. So the crescent was developed and it allows the organization to get better access to predominately Muslim areas.

But there is more to Lois Hodgins than the Red Cross.

"I am involved in the Belleville Business

and Professional Women's Club," she said. "Basically that's my main involvement outside the office now."

The group fundraises to provide bursaries for students.

Hodgins has been a stellar neighbour as a member of the Prince of Wales Parent-Teacher Association, and she helped establish the breakfast club there in the 1990s.

She said she enjoys gardening and reading. The book she recently finished had roots here — Sisters in the wilderness; The lives of Susanna Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill, by Charlotte Grey.

Other pastimes include playing euchre, cribbage and bridge.

Her adult children are in Belleville and she is looking forward to becoming a grandmother at some point.

But the Red Cross connection remains an integral part of her life because the organization allows Hodgins to feel she has made a difference in the world.

"The most satisfying is probably feeling ... I was doing something to help these people (victims)," she said.

Hodgins, as the only paid staff member of the Quinte Chapter, also feels a great deal of gratitude to one particular group.

"Thank God for the help of volunteers."

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