

electrician.

The couple decided to move to the Quinte area 25 years ago "because we didn't want to raise our kids in Toronto and it was getting too crowded. We wanted more space and to be on or near the water."

So they purchased a three-acre parcel of farmland on Northport Road, off Highway 49 and right on the Bay of Quinte, and built their family home.

"This was a big step for us to come here. Both of us grew up in the city and this was our first time living in the country," she said.

Tomlinson stayed home for the first few years to raise their two children, Mark and Laura.

She began volunteering by leading evening exercise and volleyball classes at Sophiasburgh Central School.

Her two years in that role got her hooked on becoming an instructor. Tomlinson proceeded to take many courses to become a certified fitness instructor in the late 1980s.

"I have to continually take courses to remain certified," she said.

Tomlinson has been teaching exercise classes at the Rec-Plex in Picton since it opened in the mid-1980s. She teaches two mornings a week — stretch and strength and aquafit classes.

"I used to teach aerobics but I had to give it up eight years ago when I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis," she said.

Tomlinson said she has learned to live with her condition.

"It's frustrating in that you don't know from one day to another or one hour to another when the severe pain will strike. It does strike periodically. But I'm on medication to curb the pain."

Tomlinson said she is determined not to let her arthritis consume her.

"My faith in God and support from family and friends has helped me get through the rough times...having arthritis, I've had to modify many things that I do in life, from working at home to conducting exercise classes."

She believes that God has given each person a gift.

"Sometimes we don't know what that is until we really stop and think about it," she said.

Having arthritis made her think about what is important in her life, hence her strong desire to volunteer.

Tomlinson followed her daughter into the Brownie pack and volunteered as an assistant leader for five years. She spent another five years as pack leader.

She then spent nine years helping her husband with the youth group at their Friendship United Church in Sophiasburgh.

For the past 15 years, Tomlinson has been teaching Sunday school. She is also superintendent of Sunday school and a member of the congregational board.

Her involvement in the community has grown. Three years ago, she was asked to consider coaching the PECCI co-ed swim team.

"I jumped at the opportunity. I was thrilled because of my love of swimming."

She spends six hours a week volunteering with the swim team and accompanies them on their swim meets.

"This year several boys qualified for the Ontario OFSSA finals in Brantford. I was proud of my swimmers and all the hard work they did to make it to me finals," said Tomlinson.

A little over a year ago, Tomlinson and her husband were asked to become a "leadership" couple for this area for Marriage Encounter, a worldwide organization to help happy couples enhance their married life.

They will assist in conducting weekend retreats for couples — their first retreat is expected to be next fall.

Debbie Moynes, executive director of Prince Edward Community Care, called Tomlinson "an inspiration to all that know her."

In her nomination letter to VIQ, Moynes wrote, "She is a wonderful example to the many children whose lives she touches in her volunteer work. For her, they learn the importance of helping others, of accepting help when it's needed, and of having faith that one can cope with whatever comes their way."