

Merne Branscombe named a 'Caring Canadian'

Read all about it: ^{Intell} City woman honored ^{Aug 12/98} _{p.1}

Story and photo by Bill Hunt

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"Myself, I just figured if I could help one person learn to read, my place on this earth would be secured, to some degree."

For Merne Branscombe, 59, those words exemplify her commitment to volunteering and to that end she has been honored as a Caring Canadian by the Governor-General of Canada.

The Belleville woman was informed May 26 by the Governor General's office she has been chosen to receive the award for her volunteer work with Quinte Literacy and other charitable organizations.

She is one of only 20 citizens across Canada to be presented the award this year.

A certificate and lapel pin will be presented to Branscombe at a later date. She has already received a congratulatory letter from Prime Minister Jean Chretien.

Branscombe is one of the founding members of Quinte Literacy, formed in 1985. She responded to an advertisement placed in the newspaper by Leona Hendry of the Belleville Public Library, wondering if there was a need for such a service locally. Branscombe was at the first meeting and subsequently served as treasurer, president (for three years) and in her current position as secretary.

Along with her duties as a board member, Branscombe has taught literacy one-to-one, and conducted workshops and training sessions. Many people have been encouraged by her to pursue further education or other goals, or in the case of a person with a mental disability, she helped in transition from a group home to living independently. She continues to tutor those with a desire to read and believes everyone has the right to be literate.

"Someone told me if you are a natural born teacher, one way or the other, you'll teach," she said.

Not surprisingly, Branscombe loves to read. "I'm a voracious reader. I usually have four or five books on the go at a time."

Speaking of volunteer work, Branscombe said, "I feel it's just as important as paid work."

Some of the other groups she's volunteered for include the Heart and Stroke Foundation, Arthritis Society, and some years ago, the Cancer Society. She was also involved in the Teen Program in the 1970s.

"I've volunteered most of my life."

As for the award, she said, "It's an honor, let me tell you."

The award was established in 1995 by the Governor General and is presented to "an individual whose unpaid, voluntary contributions, behind-the-scenes, provide extraordinary help or care to families or groups in the community."