

MATTHEWS, Helen.

PEOPLE

Hold the phone! Helen

By Bill Hunt

The Intelligencer

Helen Matthews was given the afternoon off work Thursday. After 35 years on the job and 32 years with a perfect attendance record, her boss felt she deserved it.

Matthews started working for Bell Canada July 31, 1961. Her pay as a "student operator" was \$32 a week.

She was 18 and it was her first job.

Matthews recalls applying for the position July 24 of that year because it's her brother's birthday. She was given an interview on a Thursday. "I had my medical on Friday and I started work on Monday."

Work involved operating something called a cord board, "plugging in and all this," she says. Each long distance call required

an operator to write a "ticket" stating where the call came from and where it was going.

A major change came in November, 1982, with the switch to a traffic operating position system (TOPS). In 1994, the multi-purpose extended position system (MPX) was introduced.

Aside from two years when Matthews left the company to have children, she has been going to the same building since she began working for Bell.

In 1968 she was made a supervisor in the operator services department. Her position hasn't changed much, although she's now called a service assistant.

Thursday, Lyn Margeson, manager of operator services and promotions, presented Matthews with a 35-year gold-plated pin and a piece of art commissioned for her. Margeson also arranged for Bell

Canada's vice-president of operator services to call Matthews and congratulate her. Matthews' daughter, Judy Patrick (who also works at Bell Canada) and grandson Justin also showed up for the event.

Matthews and Margeson then went out for lunch and Matthews was given the afternoon off work.

Reflecting on her long service with Bell Canada, Matthews says she stayed there because she loves people.

"I enjoy everything because I love working with people ... and the staff in here is great."

She is particularly grateful to Margeson for making the occasion such a special one.

And Matthews says none of it would have been possible without the support of husband Mike and children Joe Matthews and Judy Patrick.

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finally gets day off



Intelligencer photo by Bill Hunt

Helen Matthews received a 35-year pin and a specially-commissioned piece of artwork Thursday.