

McLELLAN, Verna.

'Good news' letter was initially scary

By Nancy Gummow *Intel April 26/92*
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Belleville volunteer Verna McLellan almost missed the best news of her life.

Three weeks ago McLellan received — but didn't open — a strange envelope from the Ministry of Community and Social Services because she thought it was bad news.

Instead, the letter inside told McLellan she had scored one of Ontario's highest volunteering honors — and she couldn't have been happier.

"I was just so pleased," she said. "I immediately phoned my mom in St. Catharines to tell her the good news. Reading the letter made it more official."



Verna McLellan

McLellan is one of 10 Eastern Ontario recipients of the 1991 Community Volunteer Award. It's given annually by the ministry to 40 people who have performed outstanding volunteer efforts. She receives her award May 1 in Kingston.

McLellan has built a list of impressive volunteer credentials on her resume, since moving to Belleville from Oshawa. She is a board member of the preschool called First Adventure Development Centre. She's chairman of the Adult Resource Centre, a training workshop for students with special needs. And she volunteers her time at the Local Service Centre, which helps people who fall through the social services net.

"I get a lot more out of it than I'll ever give," said McLellan, who volunteers about 20 hours each week. "At First Adventure it's fun to watch children grow and develop. It's just a joy to watch."

Working with children not only keeps the 51-year-old volunteer young, but it also helps keep a perpetual smile on her face.

"Adults can get themselves into a rut but children are so much more open to change," she said. "It's important to keep a sense of humor because at the end of the day that's all you may have left."

McLellan could write a book about her trials and tribulations as a volunteer. Instead, she chooses to remember the good times; times when she's shared a special smile or laugh with a child.

It was in McLellan's infancy that she started helping people. McLellan's mom Ester, herself an avid volunteer, brought a two-year-old Verna along to help sort socks being shipped to Canadian soldiers overseas.

McLellan dreamed of becoming an elementary school music teacher but her dreams hit to a sour note when music courses were dropped from some school's curriculum.

Now, the woman who listens to pop songstress Madonna while she irons clothes, wants to write rap music for children.

McLellan likes looking to the future. She sees her days filled with laughter and love; which go hand in hand with volunteering.