

McLellan, Verna

# And the award goes to ... the lady in the polka dotted clown suit

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by Erin McCracken

**Belleville** - If you know Verna McLellan then you wouldn't have batted an eye over the fact that she was wearing a green and white polka dotted clown suit complete with flower clips in her white curly hair when she accepted the 2004 Ruth Burrows Volunteer Award.

It was really only fitting since she wanted to do her part—as usual—and entertain the children at the seventh annual Volunteer Celebration held at the Dick Ellis Arena in Belleville last Saturday afternoon.

While the award honours the volunteer work she has done since she first came to live in Belleville 17 years ago, McLellan has been helping others from such a young age that she can't even remember those occasions. But the family's photo albums tell the story.

The 63-year-old was only two years old when one particular photo was taken. She had gone with her mom to help sort socks as part of the relief effort for the Allied troops overseas during World War II. "I come from a family of volunteers," she said simply.

Not one to hog the spotlight, McLellan took to the stage and acknowledged the politicians also standing there for the work they have provided to their communities. She said they probably started out by volunteering and only now they get paid for what they do. "But they still are always available to us," she told the crowd that had gathered for the presenta-



Decked out in full clown costume Verna McLellan accepted the 2004 Ruth Burrows Volunteer Award for her long-time and ongoing contribution to the local community. The award recipient couldn't resist dressing up to delight the children who attended the seventh annual Volunteer Celebration held at the Dick Ellis Arena in Belleville last Saturday. Here, Jangle the Clown applies some face paint to Happy the Clown a.k.a. McLellan before she accepted her award. Erin McCracken photo

tion ceremony.

And she didn't accept the award alone. "Today my name is the name on the trophy," McLellan said. "That means I represent you." Her words reflect the giving and friendly spirit that everyone knows her by. They also know her by the long list of volunteer activities she engages in within her community. She's been on the board of directors for the First Adventure Child Development Centre in Belleville for 12 years and she's also

a volunteer manager for the centre's volunteer program. She also helps out with the centre's children's programs twice a week.

McLellan is also very active at St. Matthew's United Church in Belleville and has been ever since she moved here. She sings in the church choir, teaches Sunday school, serves on the church council, visits homebound people, serves on various church committees and chronicles local events for the United Church's *Observer* magazine.

McLellan also participates in Random Acts of Kindness Week, organizes the annual children's event, United We're Awesome and is a board member of Quinte Vocational Support Services. Even the night before the volunteer celebration she was at the Belleville Walmart selling raffle tickets to help raise money for the First Adventure centre.

"It's endless," she said of the amount of volunteer work that is available in the local community. That's partly what inspires her to talk to Grade 8 students in Belleville every spring and let them know the opportunities they can take part in as they enter high school and are faced with filling 40 hours of community service. "They

can accomplish the same things as adults," McLellan said knowingly.

The award that now bears her name certainly means a lot to her. "It means the community recognizes the importance of the volunteer sector," she said with a smile. "This is a community that does."