



SCOTT WISHART The Beacon Herald

Dedicated volunteers including Bessie Thompson, left, and Rosina Morris were honoured at a volunteer service awards ceremony last night at the Arden Park Hotel in Stratford.

Decades of volunteering

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Staff Reporter

Volunteers are critical to the strength and resilience of communities and the province and are our "unsung heroes," Eric Hoskins said last night as he joined in thanking more than 200 volunteers from Perth, Oxford and Huron counties.

"This is your celebration," said the minister of citizenship and immigration. "Make some noise."

Among those receiving a public thank you from the province at the Ontario Volunteer Service Awards gathering held at the Arden Park Hotel were Rosina Morris of Tavistock and Bessie Thompson of St. Marys.

Both are long-serving Women's Institute (WI) members.

Ms. Morris, 88, said in an interview she joined the Brookside WI back in 1947 because her mother and grandmother had been members.

Several years ago, after a grandson was born with hydrocephalus, she began making brightly coloured finger puppets for children hospitalized at the London Children's Hospital.

"I saw where children were crying and scared and I thought, well, there's something I can do."

She typically makes about 200 puppets a year, supplying bags containing about 50 at a time.

"It's therapy for my hands and I know they need them there (at the hospital)," said Ms. Morris, who joined the WI in the Tavistock area when she moved there a few years ago.

"It's a nice idea," she said of the volunteer awards. "There are a lot of people who volunteer a lot of time in their community."

Ms. Morris received a special award for 60 years of volunteering.

Bessie Thompson, 75, of St. Marys, was also one of the award recipients Monday evening. She has served with the Motherwell WI since 1960 and was recognized for 50 years of continuous volunteer service.

Ms. Thompson said one of her favourite duties has been putting up agricultural fair displays. She is currently the curator for her group and has served in the past as curator for the London WI.

"We have a good time," said the St. Marys resident.

Volunteers with numerous other organizations were

awarded for service starting at five years. Included were service club members, scouts, visitors at long-term-care homes, agricultural societies, public library and museum supporters and even volunteers with the Canadian Baseball Hall of Fame.

The ceremony was one of the 47 scheduled across the province between March 26 and June 29 in which more than 10,000 Ontarians are being recognized.

"We're here tonight just to say thank you because we appreciate what you have been doing in your communities," said Perth-Wellington MPP John Wilkinson.

Huron-Bruce MPP Carol Mitchell and Oxford MPP Ernie Hardeman also offered their congratulations and thanks to the volunteers.