

Many people work selflessly to make a difference in the lives of York Region residents

The SPIRIT of

Volunteering

Teenager doesn't blow her own horn

Bhat tutors students, helps a blind student walk home

BY PATRICK MANGION
Staff Writer

Most people would consider a steady diet of television, video games or just hanging out to be normal, if not healthy, for the average teenager.

But such is not the case for 17-year-old Shashi Bhat of Richmond Hill.

Her commitment to volunteering in her community and at Richmond Hill High School are as impressive as her many accomplishments so early in life.

"It goes beyond hours," Bhat responded when asked how much time she dedicates to volunteering. "Every spare moment I have is devoted to helping out."

"The more things I do, the more ambition I have."

However, balancing her work with the non-profit, Kannada Sangha Canadian East Indian community association, her school, a writing hobby and her love of music, there isn't much left in the way of free time.

But Bhat says it's difficult to think of the volunteering as work because it's something she enjoys.

"I don't do these things just to put them on my resume."

Rather, helping others is a tradition that runs deep in her family.

"(Volunteering) wasn't a sudden realization, my dad has always been giving to others."

It all started with Kannada Sangha, an organization Bhat has been involved with since she was just three years old.

Today, Bhat works with recent immigrant children, helping them bridge the cultural gap in Canada while ensuring their heritage is not lost.

At Kannada Sangha, a non-profit organization, Bhat assists children aged three to five learn skills, such as language development, also meeting with the group regularly to help organize performances in cultural arts.

As you might expect, with much of her day spent in the classroom, Bhat, a Grade 12 student, devotes the majority

of her time chipping in to help make the learning environment more fun and more interesting.

Bhat recently developed a website for the music council, sings in three choirs and plays flute and piano.

Her love of music initiated a bond with teacher Tim Henry, head of the school's music department, over the past four years.

Last month, Henry recommended Bhat for the Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers.

"Shashi is very intelligent," said Henry. "She's low key and quiet."

"She has all these attributes but doesn't go around shouting about it. She quietly sees that everything gets done."

"It's like that saying: 'Still waters run deep.'"

At school, Bhat also helps a blind student walk home, tutors younger students and edits for several school newsletters as well as for the yearbook.

Some of Bhat's other volunteer accomplishments include organizing drives for the food bank, raising more than \$2,000 for the Hospital for Sick Children, working on a quilt project for a temple in Markham and volunteering with the public symphony orchestra in Cambridge, Massachusetts last summer.

• volunteerNOTE • HELPING YOUTH

Bill Stowe has been volunteering nearly half his life. It all started back in 1976 when he served as an assistant coach on a hockey team for the blind in Scarborough.

From there, a bevy of volunteer initiatives ensued. Stowe's volunteering has touched Newmarket's youth in particular.

Whether it was cubs, girls softball, bowling or lending a hand at schools, Stowe's generosity with his time has no doubt left its mark on the community.

DRIVING FOR SENIORS

For years, Bev Hollingsworth of Aurora, has been volunteering as a canvasser with the cancer society and the Heart and Stroke Foundation. She has also taken time as a driver for CHATS and is a friend to many seniors in her community.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Richmond Hill teenager Shashi Bhat, a student at Richmond Hill High School, has gained the respect of music teacher Tim Henry for her dedication, commitment and willingness to help others.



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