

Honouring Senior of Year part of July 1 celebrations

By Gerald Tracey
News Editor

Lake Dore – It was a bittersweet moment for Denise (Weckworth) Bergstresser on Canada Day when she received an award as the Ontario *Senior of the Year* for North Algona Wilberforce because her best volunteering partner, husband and life mate was no longer by her side.

“I miss him working by my side, in a partnership that was also a joy to share together,” she said of the loss of her husband, Dean Bergstresser, who was at her side volunteering in various capacities for many years until his sudden death on Christmas Day, 2020.

In expressing her thanks for the award, she said she was blindsided when she received the call from the township office a few days before July 1, adding she never expected or even thought about being considered for the award.

“I do enjoy volunteering and we always enjoyed doing what we could to help others, especially seniors, and more so since we retired and became part of the group,” she said. “I have kept up with my commitments to various boards and organizations since Dean’s untimely passing on December 25, 2020.”

She said they both came from families who always got involved with supporting and serving their communities and wanting to give back.

Mrs. Bergstresser said there are many others deserving of the award who are also very committed to helping and giving freely of their time.

“It warms my heart that there are so many unselfish people, especially in our community and neighbouring communities, who are like-minded,” she added. “We are truly blessed to

live where we do and be able to help one another.”

The youngest of three children born to Abbie and Esther Weckworth, who farmed along the north shore of Golden Lake on Island View Drive, her father was also the postmaster in Golden Lake. Mrs. Bergstresser said having a grandparent living with them allowed her to feel quite comfortable with a senior and their needs. Throughout her life, she watched her parents incorporate all members of the family’s needs into a smoothly functioning household. As the last one to leave the nest, she was always included in the changes. She also watched the slowing down of both her grandmother and her parents over the years.

A graduate of the Lorrain School of Nursing in Pembroke, she began her RN career in 1974 in Barry’s Bay. Although not far from Golden Lake, she knew only two families in the Bay: the Woermke’s, whom she was related to, and the Mask family on Mask’s Island as Bonnie Mask was a classmate.

However, she accepted the sage advice of the then St. Francis Memorial Hospital Administrator Sister Rosenda Brady, who told her the best way to get to know people of a community was through volunteering. And that’s what she did for the next 17 years of her life in Barry’s Bay.

In 1991, following her marriage, they moved back to the Golden Lake area, and reconnected with her church where they both pitched in to lighten the load older members were carrying. They became involved in the Golden Lake Property Owners’ Association functions, sat on the Community Policing Committee and joined the Valley Music Festival board which brought classical music

to the Valley for several years.

“When we reached retirement age we began attending and helping with activities at the very busy Eganville and District Senior Needs Association,” she said.

She eventually joined the board and both she and her late husband began delivering Meals on Wheels, worked at and supported functions at the centre and visited and called seniors regularly just to say hello and check in on them.

“After my husband’s untimely passing, I received calls from other volunteers who were kind enough to check in on me,” she shared. “Those calls were very much appreciated.

“So, I am back at it once again,” she continued. “I truly miss my partner in many things, but the simple task of volunteering is very important and, as I know firsthand, so very much appreciated.”

Like so many other dedicated volunteers, Mrs. Bergstresser firmly believes in the old saying: *you get what you give*.

Well Deserved Award

Mayor James Brose said the award to Mrs. Bergstresser was well deserved.

“I think Denise and Dean have worked so hard for the community and have volunteered for years,” he said. “It was our pleasure as council to select her as *Senior for the Year*.”

Following the presentation, each member of council was given an opportunity to say a few words. Councillor Janet Reiche-Schoenfeldt used the opportunity to encourage the younger people attending the day’s festivities to get involved in volunteering, just like Mrs. Bergstresser, because it is important to the community.

Referring to his colleague’s comments, Mayor Brose said Mrs.

Bergstresser is a good example of the importance of volunteering “and what it tends to give back to you as you get to be our age because there’s going to come a time when we need that support as well.”

Mayor Brose said the fact Mrs.

Bergstresser continues to volunteer her time in many ways will hopefully inspire others to step forward and do the same.

Coun. Reiche-Schoenfeldt said without people like Mrs. Bergstresser the community is going to

be a lot less grateful.

“You get what you give,” she said. “Many hands make light work.”

Councillor Melvin Berndt said council couldn’t have picked anyone more deserving for the award than Mrs. Bergstresser.



Denise (Weckworth) Bergstresser of Golden Lake was chosen as this year’s Senior of the Year recipient by North Algona Wilberforce Township. She was presented with the award at Canada Day festivities in Melissa Bishop Park at Lake Dore by Mayor James Brose who was joined by Councillors Melvin Berndt, Maria Robinson and Janet Reiche-Schoenfeldt.