The nominees for the 2017 Valued Elder Recognition Award (VERA) were honoured on September 29, 2017 at the Salvation Army Citadel in Victoria during the annual International Day of Older Persons Celebration.

The Institute on Aging & Lifelong Health and the Eldercare Foundation honour the United Nations’ International Day of Older Persons and the Government of Canada’s National Seniors Day on October 1st with the presentation of the Valued Elder Recognition Award (VERA). The award, first presented in October 2000, recognizes and honours individuals who over their lifetime have given exemplary service to helping others in the Capital Regional District. Award recipients are further acknowledged with a plaque at the Institute on Aging and Lifelong Health’s offices.
May Anderson
Nominating Agency:
Sooke Meals on Wheels

May Anderson has been volunteering with Sooke Meals on Wheels for over 25 years. After retiring from her job as a bookkeeper, she volunteered in a wide variety of jobs with Meals on Wheels, from being the president, treasurer, a driver or a team leader; to prepping meals from soup to dessert; to filling in whenever and wherever needed.

May always completes her work with considerable accuracy, attention to detail and dedication. She likes to think ahead and is training other volunteers on how to use the accounting and client information systems at Sooke Meals on Wheels.

May, along with feeding everyone delicious food that she cooks, also invites people into her home – this includes young adult volunteers from Canada World Youth and overseas students studying at the local high school. In her volunteer work with the Sooke Legion, she runs the cribbage league and coordinates the youth volunteers for Remembrance Day and the Battle of the Atlantic Parade.

May acts as a liaison between Meals on Wheels and Sooke Veterans, where she advises and assists with paperwork for veterans who are eligible for Meals on Wheels. She is described by her co-volunteers as sincere and diplomatic in her work with elderly veterans and seniors.

In their words…

“One of our Legion members stated, ‘She should be made a Saint’ for all she has done for the Legion and its members.” - Camille Tkacz, Service Officer Branch #54 Sooke

“May has been remarkably reliable at all times and always at home on the three cooking days, should she be needed, to solve any problems.” - Lorraine Hoy, Sooke Meals on Wheels
Bonnie Davoren

Nominating Agency: 
Family Caregivers of BC

Bonnie has practiced the St. Joseph’s School of Nursing motto “Non Nobis Solum – Not for Ourselves Alone” since graduation – a valuable legacy of her training at St. Joseph’s, a nursing school she is proud to have attended.

She started volunteering with the Family Caregivers of British Columbia in 2002. Bonnie facilitates the family caregiver group and strongly believes that caregivers are important for the country’s wellbeing. Her compassionate nature and background as a geriatric nurse adds invaluable insight to the program.

Shortly after retiring, Bonnie joined Seniors Serving Seniors and became a key volunteer in the Return to Health (RTH) program. Through delivery of her specialized course Bonnie trained over 250 volunteers to provide encouragement and support to frail and isolated seniors on their return home from a hospital stay. She was awarded with an honorary life membership for her exceptional contribution to Seniors Serving Seniors in June 2016.

Bonnie’s ability to connect with people and her effervescent and energetic nature makes her the perfect person in her role as a therapeutic touch practitioner at the Cancer Clinic.

In their words…

“Bonnie is one of those volunteers you can rely on – she has excellent judgment, is very responsible, and asks for the information and support she needs.” – Catherine Traer-Martinez, BC Cancer Agency

“I find myself always feeling good after a few minutes with Bonnie. This is the Bonnie Magic.” – Barb MacLean, Family Caregivers of BC
Norma Fitzsimmons
Nominating Agency:
Our Place Society

Norma Fitzsimmons is nominated for her five years of volunteer work at Our Place but she has volunteered most of her life – approximately 80 years. She received commendations, including a “Citizen of the Year” from CFAX Community Awards (1961), a Golden Jubilee Medal from the Governor General of Canada (2002), and an Honorary Citizen Award from the City of Victoria (2006).

In the early 1970s, the Visitors Bureau wanted to encourage tourists to visit Victoria in the winter. Norma suggested counting flowers, and created the annual Victoria Flower Count.

Norma gained her flower arranging skills from her 35 years as owner and operator of Island Florist. A man who stopped her on the street commented on a bouquet of flowers she was carrying; this chance encounter inspired her to join Our Place Society where she prepares and donates beautiful flower arrangements for holiday meals.

She has volunteered for the Art Gallery of Great Victoria for over 20 years, where she organizes events and does flower arrangements. She volunteered for the Victoria Symphony Society for 10 years, and for the BC Heart and Stroke Foundation for 15 years (as regional coordinator for fundraising for Greater Victoria and the Gulf Islands).

Norma is warm and welcoming. She is considered truly a one-of-a-kind by everyone she meets. Ever since moving to her current home in 1985, she has hosted a summer and Christmas potluck for her neighbours.

In their words…

“As she approaches another birthday milestone, I can only say Norma continues to be an inspiration with an infectious spirit, who regularly reminds us “Do not underestimate the power of a flower.” – Daphne Massey, Club Elle Society

“Her gifts are many, but her shining star is her commitment to her community, her caring for others known and unknown, taking the time to listen and connect; she is warm and open, kind and thoughtful and truly a joy to work with.” – Tracey Campbell, Our Place Society
Joan Grove

Nominating Agency: Thrifty Foods Sendial Program

Joan has been volunteering with the Sendial Volunteer Program at Quadra Thrifty Foods Store since 1994. She is responsible for filling customer’s grocery orders. Her career as a retail pharmacy clerk at Jubilee Pharmasave gave her great insight into shopping for some of the trickier orders. She also assists with organizing, nurturing and overseeing the volunteer team. She finds helping people and her experience at Sendial to be worthwhile and rewarding. Joan believes this program enables members of the community to continue to live in their own residences and assist in alleviating an otherwise unmet community need, making it a worthwhile and rewarding program. Joan is known for making a comfortable environment for others and is well liked by her peers. She is a “go to” person to in the store.

Joan has also volunteered as a classroom assistant and library reorganization assistant at Victoria School District # 61 (1989 to 1993). She served as a dining room greeter and seating assistant for the Commonwealth Games in 1994.

Joan’s keen sense of humor makes her fun to be around and her attention to detail has made her an asset to the entire team. Joan’s great listening skill, patience and comforting personality makes her indispensable for her role as a Sendial Shopping Volunteer.

In their words…

“Sendial and Thrifty Foods are appreciative and proud of Joan for having received this award. She is a valuable asset to our team and the many customers she unselfishly helps.” – Lynanne Smith, Sendial and Thrifty Foods

“Joan was known as the “Treat Lady”, because she would take upon herself the responsibility to query the other volunteers about what kind of treat they would like from the store for having worked their shift and then set about to obtain, reconcile with the store and provide those treats for each member of the entire team.” – Linda Pearson, Sendial Volunteer
Molli Holser

*Nominating Agency: Abbeyfield House, St. Peters*

Molli has been volunteering with Abbeyfield House St. Peters for over a decade now (since 2007). She gives rides to the seniors, runs errands for them, attends phone calls, and does computer work, among other things. Molli’s compassion and commitment to improve the quality of life for residents is appreciated by everyone at Abbeyfield. She brings colour into their lives in many ways – including her clothes, hair and personality.

Abbeyfield House St. Peters is an independent seniors home with 12 residents. It is a place where Molli makes sure everyone is treated with dignity and respect. She is willing to do whatever it takes to help people there. Her modus operandi is “I do it because it is the right thing to do”.

Molli also knits and donates prayer shawls for one of the Abbeyfield House St. Peters’ resident’s church.

Molli owns Zydeco Gift Shop. She also spent many years volunteering for Boy Scouts of America.

In their words…

“Her devotion to her willingness to do whatever it takes to help people is nothing short of remarkable. Her modus operandi is “I do it because it is the right thing to do”. The world need many more people like Molli.” – Tracy Gatabaki, House Coordinator

“Molli knows the colour of kindness and faithfulness and patience for all whom she helps and we love her for it… Our lives would not be same without her.” - Maise (Mary) Riddle
Edward Humphreys  
**Nominating Agency:**  
*First Unitarian Church of Victoria*

Edward H. Humphreys was born in Toronto at the depth of the depression. Watching his widowed mother’s efforts to see her two daughters and son through high school and university while working 12 hours a day made him a life-long feminist. He founded the Ethel May Trust Fund in 2005 in memory of his mother. The trust operates through the First Unitarian Church of Victoria and assist local families – in particular abused women and their children. In 2016, the Ethel May Trust dispersed $10,297 through 21 cases, assisting 22 adults and 17 children.

Prior to moving to Victoria in 2002, Ted taught for seven years, ran for political office at the provincial and federal level, served on and chaired two school boards in Ontario. Ever since he and his wife, Ruth, moved to Victoria, they have been active members of First Unitarian Church of Victoria, which has provided his imaginative initiatives a perfect platform.

Another innovative creation of Ted’s was the annual Unsung Hero’s project which honoured community charity volunteers. He not only funded the dinner but took on multiple roles – from chairing the organizing committee to being one of the evening waiters.

Ted also served on the church management board for over six years. He was among the first in his church to stir a response to the Sumatra earthquake in 2004. Under the umbrella of the Unitarian Church Ted continues to actively support charities including Child Haven and the Ethel May Fund.

**In their words…**

“Ted Humphreys is a generous and gifted leader who would make a truly worthy recipient of the Valued Elder Recognition Award.” – Earle Anthony

“One of my most vivid memories of Ted was of him standing at the pulpit, his voice breaking, on Sunday, Dec. 26, 2004. Earlier that day, off the coast of Sumatra in the Indian Ocean, an earthquake which registered 9.1 on the Richter scale began a series of catastrophic tsunamis which we learned later took 280,000 lives and left millions homeless. He exhorted the congregation to make a special response – which we did, as did the rest of the world.” – Don Vipond, First Unitarian Church of Victoria
John Hurlburt
Nominating Agency: Oak Bay Volunteer Services

John moved to Victoria in the 1970s and began volunteering as a camp counsellor with the Easter Seal. John also spent four summers at the Lake Cowichan Camp. He has been volunteering with the Oak Bay Volunteer Service since 1987 where he assists community members so they can stay in their own homes. His kindness, caring, and attentive nature is much appreciated by team members and clients. John received the humanitarian award from the Rosicrucian Order to honour his volunteer work.

John is also an active member of the Oak Bay United Church. He greets, composes and delivers messages, prayers, and blessing at meetings. John and his wife volunteer as greeters for Tourism Victoria at Ogden Point when cruise ships arrive.

John was diagnosed, at a relatively young age, with a neurological disease that is gradually taking away his mobility. Now, he embraces the time he has been given as a gift to be given in service, love, and laughter.

Over the years he has volunteered with the Mount St. Mary’s Hospital, the Commonwealth Games (1994), Santa Anonymous, the UVic medical school, and the Aboriginal Games (1997) and continues to greet members at the Monterey Centre for seniors during their weekly sing-a-longs. John loves nature, and music and recently taken up photography as a hobby.

In their words...

“Degenerative brain disease caused him to stop this employment. Yet... he continues to find ways of inviting other into laughter, playfulness and joy. His genuine acceptance, sincere interest in others, and desire to help make people feel comfortable and at home, radiates through him and everything he does.”- Rev. Michelle Slater, Oak Bay United Church

“Perhaps John’s most special gift is his intertwined sense of humility and humour. John has an irresistible way of inviting other into laughter, playfulness and joy. His genuine acceptance, sincere interest in others, and desire to help make people feel comfortable and at home, radiates through him and everything he does.”- Rev. Michelle Slater, Oak Bay United Church
Joyce Metson
Nominating Agency: Oak Bay Lodge

Joyce has been an exceptional volunteer for the Oak Bay Lodge for over 24 years. Her love of books made her a perfect fit for Oak Bay Lodge’s lending library, where she shared her love with others. After the library service was cancelled due to decline in cognitive abilities of residents, Joyce volunteered as a tea server to the residents and soon after became a part of the tuck shop. The tuck shop at the Oak Bay Lodge is a small store for residents and staff to purchase items and Joyce has helped organizing the store and assists residents with their purchases. She has always given special care and attention to the residents and their families at the lodge.

Joyce also volunteers for the Maritime Museum of British Columbia. She acquired knowledge about the sea from her husband, who went to sea most of his life. Joyce has taken on many different volunteer roles with the visitor centre, membership and donations, and special events for the museum. Her unfaltering commitment towards her work and constant support makes her a gem of the Museum. She is quick to pass along her acquired knowledge of BC maritime history to the curious visitors and staff. She goes above and beyond welcoming visitors with a smile and answering any questions. Her friendly personality, energetic attitude, and commitment make her a delightful person and an asset for any organization.

In their words…

“Joyce has been described by our members as a “gem of the Maritime Museum of BC.””
– Rachel Meyer, Maritime Museum of BC

“Joyce Metson has not only been excellent volunteer, but part of the Oak Bay Lodge Family” – Carolyn Hoekstra, Therapy Services & Adult Day Centre
Dave Ranson
Nominating Agency: Oak Bay Emergency Program

Dave Ranson started as a Zone leader for a neighbourhood zones program in Oak Bay’s Emergency Program (OBEP) 20 years ago. He is now a lead member of the Emergency Preparedness Presentations Team, where he shares his simple and practical approach to emergency preparedness with his fellow volunteers and members of the community.

Among many other roles at OBEP, Dave helps set up emergency preparedness booths in the community, and assists with finding temporary accommodation, food, and clothing in emergency or disaster situations.

Dave managed information technology operations infrastructure before retiring and investing his time into Oak Bay’s Emergency Program. Dave is a true team player and is highly respected and valued by his volunteer team. Dave’s enthusiasm and ability to avail himself to take on whatever role is needed makes him invaluable.

In their words…

“His long term contributions to the community through public education sessions has increased the level of preparedness by our residents resulting in a more disaster resilient community.” – Darren Hughes, Deputy Fire Chief, Deputy Emergency Coordinator, Oak Bay Emergency

“I would like to recommend Dave for the VERA because he has given his time and knowledge to help make the OBEP an outstanding source of necessary information to all in the community. Dave never refuses a request and initiates changes when necessary.” – Diane Payne, Volunteer, Oak Bay Emergency Program
Elizabeth Surerus
Nominating Agency:
Individual Learning Centre

Inspired from the Cinderella Project in Vancouver, the Magic Wand Project for Grads is a ray of sunshine for all students to help reduce the cost of graduation – especially those who might miss their grad without it. Sixteen years ago, Elizabeth Surerus started the Magic Wand in her spare bedroom, using the slogan “why buy when you can borrow”. The first year was challenging but Elizabeth wanted to make magic happen for these new graduates. Now, the not-for-profit organization is located in one of the classrooms at the Individual Learning Centre and loans students a gown or tuxedo, including accessories. A small fee to cover help dry cleaning and expenses – some fees are waived when necessary. Her friends believe she has a flair of choosing the right outfit for anyone.

Elizabeth taught physical education at university and in the school system for four years and was a student counsellor for 12 years before retiring. She is an accomplished piano teacher and taught piano for 15 years.

Elizabeth also volunteers with the Horticulture Centre of the Pacific and enjoys interacting with people there. She has previously volunteered at the Hospice Boutique Thrift Shop, as a camp director at Camp Pringle, as a big sister, as a friendly visitor, and as a Need Crisis phone volunteer.

In their words…

“I admired her tenacity and determination to make her non-profit business a success and am so pleased it has grown over the years and has helped countless young people at such a special time in their lives.” – Barbara Waldner, Cordova Bay United Church

“I cannot overemphasize the difference she has made for so many young people – all of whom were given the opportunity to celebrate the huge milestone of graduation with style and dignity” – Allyson Hoffman, Counsellor, Esquimalt High School
Judy Thomas has volunteered with the Royal Canadian Legion Branch #91 since 2005. The Royal Canadian Legion benefits the entire community including but not limited to veterans, seniors, first responders, cadets, youth, food banks, and disaster response. Judy assists with the preparation and organization of foods for seniors, for celebration of life events, and the annual Remembrance Day services. She also sits on the financial committee and her managerial and financial skills are of a great asset to the branch. She acts as treasurer and her ethical attributes ensure the books are meticulously maintained.

Judy has faithfully volunteered for the Poppy Sales prior to November 11th (Remembrance Day) every year, as well working in the kitchen on that special day. She ran the day-to-day operations of the kitchen at the Legion for a year before it was closed. Judy also volunteers at the First Unitarian Church and provides leadership with the Jammers, a group of 17 singers who visit extended care homes to play piano and choral opportunities for patients. Her piano playing gets drowsy patients moving and even singing along.

Judy was a computer technician for provincial government for retiring. Judy enjoys cooking and playing piano.

In their words...

“Judy started playing and we started singing, they begin showing more signs of life. Toes started moving beneath the blankets on their laps. The ones who knew the tune were singing along in unison. It felt like we were breathing life into people. That is what I will remember about Judy.” – Peter Hancock, Member of the Jammers

“Judy is a wonderful mentor for younger members of our executive as she is always willing to provide advice when asked, share a recipe with the kitchen staff, and teach others how to play shuffleboard.” – Bea LeBlanc