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Community Service Award Winners

Beyond Numbers · June 2009

By Michelle McRae, Editor

The Institute's Community Service Award recognizes CAs who've gone above and beyond in volunteering their skills for the betterment of the community. This year's winners are: Dennis Cojuco, CA; Michael (Mike) Mah, CA; Jaime Roberts, CA; and Cecil Schmidt, CA.

Dennis Cojuco, CA



Dennis Cojuco says he made his first real foray into volunteerism while attending the University of BC, where he acted as vice-president of the Filipino Student Association (FSA), and served as humanitarian project coordinator for UBC ONE (another student association). With the former, he led an initiative to provide support to various soup kitchens in the Downtown Eastside; with the latter, he organized fundraising events for Sunny Hill Health Centre for Children in Vancouver.

Then in 1999, Dennis and four friends from FSA and UBC ONE created Enspire Foundation. They had two primary goals in mind: to support the education of children living in substandard conditions, and to inspire others to make a difference in the global community.

"Growing up in the Philippines, I saw firsthand the lives of those who are less fortunate," says Dennis, who describes Enspire's mission as "empowering and uplifting through education and encouragement."

The group began their outreach program by organizing soup kitchens, hosting several fundraisers, and forging a partnership with the Pag-aalay Ng Puso Foundation (PPF) in the Philippines. Between 1999 and 2002, they sent funds, through PPF, to help pay for the education of children in Navotas, a poverty-stricken city in Metro Manila.

In 2002, the Enspire team launched "Resonance," an annual amateur choir festival and fundraising event that features choirs from across the Lower Mainland. Enspire's last six festivals have raised more than \$62,000—money that has gone overseas toward the tuition fees of indigent students in Navotas, and locally to Richmond High's Global Perspectives Program. This money also enabled Enspire to fund and build the first stand-alone library in Norzagaray, in the Philippines' Bulacan province. Dennis was one of 15 Canadians to help build the facility in 2006.

"After Resonance 2002, we had the idea of building a community on land that had been donated to PPF," he explains. "The library now provides a venue for people from nearby regions to congregate, and it's conducive to learning for local children, including children whose families are nomadic and living in the mountains."

Enspire continues to support families in Navotas and help build the community in Norzagaray. In May 2009, Dennis and a group of Canadian professionals and students (from UBC, Simon Fraser University, and Capilano University) helped fund and build the first two homes of a new housing community for 130 low-income families.

"In the long term, we hope to undertake similar projects in other developing countries," Dennis says. "It's very rewarding to meet the individuals who've received an education, and to see them succeed in their

chosen careers. And it's always rewarding when people tell us they've found hope and when we see others give back to their communities."

Dennis has served as vice-president and a director of Enspire since its inception, and as one of the lead event coordinators for Resonance since 2002. He remained committed to these responsibilities throughout his articling period, and his commitment has only intensified since he became a CA in 2008.

"The support provided by my family and friends, and our volunteers, has given me the extra energy to continue volunteering during the busiest times," he says. "It has involved some sacrifices, but it's all worth it knowing that we're helping to improve the lives of others."

A senior associate at PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, Dennis has been recognized as a PwC Canada Foundation champion for his volunteerism.

Mike Mah, CA



For the past 56 years, Mike Mah has lived in Nanaimo. It's a long way from his birthplace—a small village in the province of Guangdong, in China, which his family fled in 1949 in search of a better life. After four years in Hong Kong, the family immigrated to Canada. Already home to Mike's paternal grandparents, Nanaimo was the obvious choice.

"Life has been very good to me here," he says. "Especially coming from the old country... life has been very good."

Gratitude is one of the reasons for Mike's tireless volunteerism in Nanaimo, which extended throughout his 38-year career with Church Pickard & Co., and continued after his retirement as managing partner of the firm in 2000.

"I feel it's my duty to give back," he says. "I want to do my part in making a difference, because there is so much need in the world."

Mike has given back in numerous ways, including serving as a director and audit committee member for BCAA; as an advisor and director for Malaspina International High School; as a director and treasurer of the Nanaimo Symphony Society; and as a director and officer of both the Greater Nanaimo Chamber of Commerce and the Nanaimo District Hospital Foundation. For the latter, he also served as president.

For the CA profession, Mike chaired the ICABC's Annual Conference Committee in 1977, and served as one of its members in the 1980s. In the 1970s, he also served as the first president of the Nanaimo CA Association.

"We called our first social event the 'T4 Frolic,'" he laughs. "It was a lot of fun. The CA club really offered a chance for members in our area to come together."

A long-time charter member of the Nanaimo North Rotary Club, Mike was recognized as Rotarian of the Year in 1979. He served as Club president in 1983, and led a successful initiative in 1995 to have women members admitted to his Rotary Club.

Deeply committed to helping immigrants in his community, Mike worked with the Cathay Senior Citizens Housing Society to provide housing for residents displaced by a fire that destroyed Nanaimo's entire Chinatown district in 1960. With the Chinese Memorial Society, he helped raise funds to restore a neglected Chinese cemetery; on completion of the reconstruction, this cemetery was donated to the City for public use. Mike also helped establish a garden commemorating the area's Chinese pioneers.

In 1999, the City recognized his myriad efforts with a Certificate of Recognition.

Today, Mike is a committee member of the Nanaimo Dragonboat Festival Society, which he helped to establish. The Society raises funds to donate to the Nanaimo Regional General Hospital for the purchase of breast cancer diagnostic equipment. He is also the current president of the Nanaimo Chinese Cultural Society.

"Volunteering has brought me a lot of joy and some wonderful friendships," Mike says. "I'm sure I have gained more than I have given."

Jaime Roberts, CA



Jaime Roberts has participated in Victoria-area soccer programs since 1996, when she moved to Victoria from her home-town of Campbell River (where her father Dennis Berntson, CA, is a public practitioner) to attend the University of Victoria. Over the past 13 years, Jaime has contributed to the BC Government Employees Co-Ed Soccer Society as a player and a team manager, has competed in two women's summer leagues, and has coached a local girls team. But her most extensive involvement has been with the Gordon Head Soccer Association (GHSA), a community-based soccer club with approximately 1,200 members.

Jaime was invited to join the club's board of directors as treasurer in 2004, shortly after she qualified as a CA.

"I'd enjoyed the benefits of being a player with the club for approximately eight years at that point, so it seemed only reasonable that I should give something back," Jaime remembers. "Also, I'd just taken a job as controller of the Victoria Golf Club, and I thought the added hands-on accounting and board experience I would get from being treasurer at GHSA would be beneficial in my new job."

After serving as treasurer for three years, Jaime didn't step down from the board—instead, she transitioned into a new role as the club's volunteer coordinator. With only a handful of people volunteering in the club's day-to-day operations at the time, the workload was becoming difficult to manage. In her new role, Jaime was tasked with increasing the number of volunteers and linking them to jobs.

One of her first coups was to recruit Richard Halliburton, CA, the father of two children in the GHSA program, to serve as the board's new treasurer. Many other calls, however, went unanswered. So Jaime helped the board implement a new participation fee and policy in an effort to turn things around.

As a result of this new, formal policy, volunteer participation is up dramatically. In addition to redistributing the workload, this increased involvement has helped keep costs down, making the club more affordable and accessible for kids in the community.

Jaime's many other contributions to the GHSA include serving as team coordinator of the Division 2 Women's team since 2007, and helping with everything from funding and grant applications to facilities usage and communications. In 2008, she also helped the club's Fundraising Committee raise \$85,000 toward building an \$800,000 artificial turf soccer field.

"I've enjoyed seeing these things happen," Jaime says. "And I've enjoyed meeting all of the different people at the GHSA. This experience has given me a greater appreciation for what it takes to make a club like this run smoothly. I have a lot of respect for the dedication of every coach, manager, board member, and volunteer—they are the heart of these organizations."

Since joining BC Ferries as a senior financial analyst in 2006, Jaime has participated in the BC Ferry Employees Community Breakfast program, which provides hot meals to the homeless several times per year.

Cecil Schmidt, BA, CA



Cecil Schmidt has been an active volunteer in the Vernon Community for more than 40 years. His dedication is attributable, in large part, to the example set by his parents. As a young boy growing up in the Prairies in the 1930s and '40s, Cecil watched his parents eke out a living farming on rented land and working for others.

"They never had much of a chance," he says, "but they were determined to provide a better education for their family."

In tenth grade, Cecil's parents sent him to a boarding school run by Benedictine monks. The monks, he says, "provided excellent teaching and character building," and their dedication to service made a lasting impression.

Cecil initially pursued social work as a career, but shifted his focus to accounting after moving to Calgary and entering a five-year student program with what was then Collins & Collins. In 1968, he accepted an invitation to move to Vernon and work with the same firm, which later became Collins Barrow (now BDO Dunwoody LLP). He retired from the firm's partnership 20 years ago, and from the office 15 years ago.

One of the first clients with whom Cecil worked was the Vernon & District Association for the Mentally Handicapped. This proved pivotal, he says, as it introduced him to local-area charities. He is still involved with the Association, and his 30+ years of service have included acting as president for one term and as treasurer for several years.

Over the years, he has volunteered with multiple organizations in almost every sector of Vernon life. These include the Vernon & District Performing Arts Centre (founding member), the North Okanagan Community Concert Association, the Vernon Curling Club (now a life member), the North Okanagan CA Association (for which he served as president from 1985 to 1987), the United Way, the Vernon & District Immigration Services Society (VDISS), and the Boys and Girls Club.

In addition, Cecil is an active member of St. James Catholic Church, and has served as a member of the church's finance committee. He also served on the board of St. James School, and served as president for one term. Today, he continues to serve as a lay assistant at Sunday services, and volunteers with the Knights of Columbus in their endeavours through the Okanagan Commemorative Pioneer Cultural Society (OCPCS). To date, the OCPCS has initiated the building of the Gateby, an intermediate care facility; the Schubert Centre, a seniors centre; and Columbus Court, a low-cost housing complex for seniors. Cecil first worked with the OCPCS as an auditor, then began volunteering after his retirement.

In 1994, his church responded to a call from the VDISS to sponsor immigrants, and Cecil and his wife Muriel were eager to help with the refugee program. They helped with everything from locating housing to helping immigrants obtain landed immigrant status and apply for citizenship. They even offered child care, and Muriel taught some of the new arrivals how to drive.

"The key is that Muriel has always supported me," says Cecil of his volunteer efforts. "We make a good partnership."

Today, they continue to help immigrants and seniors in their community.

In 2004, Cecil received Vernon's "Good Citizen of the Year" award. But he says acclaim has never interested him, adding: "We're happy with what we do."

Congratulations to our Community Service Award winners! We commend you and your fellow volunteers for all the work that you do.