



Municipality Recognizes Volunteers with Award Ceremony and Reception

Dec. 10, 2024

Mayor Dave Corkum, members of Municipal Council and staff at the Municipality of the County of Kings gathered with community to celebrate volunteers on Dec. 9.

Soulful jazz and funk music by The Mark Riley Project filled the lobby of the Municipal Complex as special guests arrived for an evening award celebration and dessert reception.

“Within our community of communities, volunteers are the heart, and tonight we are here to celebrate all of you,” said event host Graysen Parker, a Diversity Specialist with the Municipality.

Each year, the Municipality invites community members and organizations to submit nominations for three main volunteer awards: Youth Volunteer of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, and Ted Meldum Volunteer of the Year.

Mayor Corkum presented nominees with a certificate and token of appreciation during the award ceremony. Award winners were selected based on overall years of service, variety and impact of service, and time committed to volunteerism. **The 2024 award winners are as follows:**

Volunteer of the Year - Valerie Despres

Valerie was nominated by the Annapolis Valley African Violet Society. A longtime member and past president of the Society, Valerie is a qualified senior judge with the African Violet Society of America and has judged shows across the Maritimes, Canada, and the United States. She has also served as a director and committee member of the African Violet Society of Canada. Valerie's greatest impact, however, has been in the Nicholsville community, where she and her husband Paul run the Nicholsville Community Hall. She organizes numerous groups, including the Nicholsville Garden Club, the Wilmot



Mayor Dave Corkum presents Valerie Despres with the Municipality's Volunteer of the Year Award.

Garden Club, and a ukulele group that entertains at local senior homes. Valerie is also active in the Annapolis Valley Giant Vegetable Growers Association and the West Kings Community Fair. During the challenging COVID years, her volunteer efforts were particularly impactful, as she helped community stay connected and uplifted, often contributing both her time and personal resources.

Youth Volunteer of the Year - Phoenix Barkhouse

Phoenix was nominated by Catapult Leadership Society, a non-profit organization that empowers young people in the province by providing mentorship, skill-building opportunities, and leadership training to help them thrive personally and professionally.

They are nominated for their outstanding leadership, passion, and commitment to making a difference in their community. They consistently go above and beyond, helping others with a positive and inclusive attitude, and are dedicated to teaching the next generation. Volunteer contributions include NKEC Broadcasting initiative, NKEC Media Club, Valley Ghost Walks, Windsor Trains, Adventure Club, and Royal Canadian Air Cadets.

Phoenix identified a gap in broadcasting for school teams and took the initiative to create a plan, bringing live streaming to families far and wide. Phoenix's nominator says, "Phoenix cares about cultivating a sense of community and inclusion and seeks out opportunities to play their part in multiple ways to make the community better."



Mayor Dave Corkum presents Phoenix Barkhouse with the Municipality's Youth Volunteer of the Year Award.

Ted Meldrum Volunteer of the Year - Gloria Field

The Ted Meldrum award is presented in memory of a former employee of the Municipality who was passionate about recreation and volunteerism.

This year's recipient, Gloria Field, has been an invaluable educational assistant for more than 10 years, consistently going above and beyond to support her students. She works tirelessly to create engaging programming and support students' needs, often spending her own money on materials like toys, snacks, and clothing. Gloria forms strong relationships



Mayor Dave Corkum and Recreation Coordinator Maria Lahoud present Gloria Field with the Ted Meldrum Volunteer Award.

with each child, encouraging them to take risks while always striving to meet them where they are. Outside of the classroom, she plays a key role in fundraising for the school, raising thousands of dollars for a new swing set by collecting recyclables across the Annapolis Valley and engaging with local businesses and communities. Gloria's dedication continues as she works to fundraise for bicycles and storage for the students. Her heart, commitment, and tireless efforts make a profound impact on both her students and the community.

Mayor Corkum commended the Municipality's Community Development staff for hosting an excellent volunteer recognition event.

"We have an outstanding group of volunteers that do some fantastic work for the benefit of their communities. I don't know where we would be without them and the fantastic work they do," said Mayor Corkum.

"Volunteering truly makes a difference."

Meet the Nominees:

Piper Durling - Youth Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Piper was nominated by the Annapolis Valley Frugal Moms Society, an organization dedicated to supporting families in their fight against hunger and the rising cost of living. She was recognized for her consistent and dedicated volunteer contributions. Her nominator shares, "Even at such a young age, Piper is an invaluable asset to the team!"



Shelley Hardy – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Shelley was nominated for Volunteer of the Year by Lake Paul & Lake George Community Club. She has been a dedicated volunteer and pillar of her community for over twenty years. For more than ten years, she has served as the President of the Lake Paul and Lake George Community Club, where she has facilitated support for community members in need through fundraising, meal preparation, and organizing resources like firewood. Shelley also dedicates countless hours managing the community hall, and her positive, tireless dedication inspires others to lend a hand, benefiting the entire surrounding area.



Nan Smith – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Nan has been a dedicated, caring, and innovative volunteer at Shannex Orchard Court, a 62-bed long-term care facility in Kentville. Since her retirement as an elementary school teacher, she has continued to nurture, support, and comfort others, always prioritizing the needs of the residents. Nan regularly assists with various recreation programs and facilitates seasonal craft sessions, providing supplies for residents to create personal, meaningful items. Her lively personality brightens their days, and she also invites her Red Hat group to host special functions for the residents a few times each year. Her invaluable contributions to the facility are deeply appreciated.



Sara Fraser – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Sara was nominated by Scouts Canada – 2nd Berwick Group. She has been a registered volunteer with the Scouts for five years and has become a key contributor to program planning. Sara is actively involved with the Beavers and Cubs and is always willing to help with Scouts when needed. She attends all planning meetings, volunteers to run projects, picks up materials, and organizes events. Sara enjoys participating in fundraising and community service projects with the kids, always offering new ideas and ways to engage the youth. Despite working full-time and raising three children, she dedicates much of her time to providing youth with the great adventures and experiences that Scouting offers.



Ralph Comeau – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Nominated by Fidelis House Society, a welcoming 'home away from home' for patients and their guests located on the grounds of Valley Regional Hospital in Kentville, Ralph has made significant contributions to the organization. Fidelis House has been operating since 1992, offering affordable accommodations to primarily seniors and those from rural areas, funded entirely through donations. Ralph has volunteered in the day-to-day operations and has served as President of the Board of Directors since 2016. He played a key role in establishing policies and overseeing the addition of four guest rooms, managing a \$4-million budget and supervising the construction. His leadership and management skills have been invaluable to the success of the organization.



Sherry Martin – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Sherry, alongside her daughter and granddaughter, has made remarkable contributions to the Annapolis Valley Frugal Moms Society, which has nominated her for this recognition. Together with other volunteers, she helps families, seniors, and the homeless with food, clothing, and household items. The Annapolis Valley Frugal Moms Society provides meals to up to 100 people a day at their Kentville location and helped rescue over 330,000 pounds of food last year.



Sherry also bakes fresh bread for the unhoused to make sandwiches and creates comfort blankets for families affected by cancer. She goes above and beyond every day, even when she should be resting, by moving food, doing counts, and organizing food pop-ups for those in need.

Melinda Cote – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Melinda, along with her mother and daughter, makes up the dedicated team in North Alton. Despite facing health challenges, she is always ready to help with food rescues, clothing pick-ups, giveaways, and fundraising. As the head of the fundraising team, Melinda's hard work and dedication are crucial to the organization's success. Through her efforts, the Annapolis Valley Frugal Moms provide food resources, teach gardening and preservation, and offer emergency hampers, as well as support for Christmas, Easter, and back-to-school needs.



Tara Hirtle – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Nominated by the Western Kings 4-H Project Club, a youth organization that helps young people develop leadership, public speaking, and community service skills through hands-on projects and fun activities.

Tara has made exceptional contributions to both the club and her community. As a dedicated lighthouse leader and former chairperson of the Kings County Lighthouse Committee, she has organized events, fundraisers, and supported clean-ups and community activities.

Tara helps 4-H members with public speaking and demonstrations, volunteers on multiple committees, and contributes her photography skills. Provincially, she was involved in 4-H Nova Scotia's 100th Anniversary Committee and has attended various community events. Tara's positive attitude and dedication make her a vital part of the 4-H community.



John Brown – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

John Brown was nominated by Burlington Community Club, which fosters the well-being of all community members. Since moving to Burlington more than two years ago, John has quickly put his leadership skills to work, actively contributing to community projects. He is a dedicated volunteer with a focus on youth and inclusion, demonstrated through his work with Outside the Box, a day program for young adults with disabilities. John has

also advocated for safety improvements, such as the installation of high-speed internet at the Burlington Hall to enhance emergency communication. His dedication, innovation, vision, and compassion make him a standout community volunteer.



Brenda Griffin – Volunteer of the Year Nominee

Nominated for Volunteer of the Year by the Hall's Harbour Community Development Association, Brenda has made outstanding contributions to the community. She played a pivotal role in facilitating interactions between Acadia University students and community members, organizing focus groups, and leading public meetings for waterfront climate change initiatives. Brenda's positivity, problem-solving skills, and dedication are evident in her volunteer work. She has served on



several boards and committees, including the Kings Volunteer Resource Centre, where she chairs the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, and has volunteered for the Special Olympics, Kings County Caregiver Support Group, and other local organizations. Brenda's commitment to helping others and her uplifting presence make her an invaluable asset to the community.