

## Fiona Cowles named King's Citizen of the Year

By Mark Pavilons



It's hard to put a value on the contributions of King Township's army of volunteers.

They were given well deserved accolades during the annual Community Showcase and Volunteer Appreciation Night, held at Kingbridge Centre May 1.

The top award 'Citizen of the Year' went to Fiona Cowles, whose tireless efforts reverberate through such organizations as Concerned Citizens of King Township (CCKT), Oak Ridges Trail Association, Heritage King, King Township Historical Society and the Special Olympics.

A resident since 1973, Cowles even spent nine years working for King Township's parks and recreation department.

The unanticipated honour came as a 'great surprise' to Cowles, who thanked council and those who nominated her.

Cowles refers to her efforts as 'eclectic volunteering,' since she's involved in a great number of different aspects of life in King. As a hiking enthusiast, Cowles recalls first coming to King and helping to create the Oak Ridges Trail Association as a founding member. Today, the trail, which stretches from Caledon through the Northumberland Forest, is a 275-kilometre swath of pristine pathways, and the portion running through King is by far the 'most attractive.'

Cowles admitted that volunteering can be an uphill battle at times, relative to the cause. She remains a steadfast supporter of our heritage resources and features, which are vital to the quality of life here in King.

This ties in with good planning and sustainability. With CCKT, she plays a role in helping to keep King green with a thoughtful approach to planning.

Through all of her volunteer activities, Cowles admitted she's met a great array of people and she highly recommends volunteering 'it will enrich your experience of King.'

Cowles summed it up by quoting Margaret Mead: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.'

'We will keep trying,' Cowles said.

She got involved in municipal politics in Edinburgh and in 1967, she ran for a council position with Edinburgh City Council. The big issue of the time was trying to stop a major bypass being built through 'The Meadows' in Edinburgh, which would have ruined the old city. Cowles came in second out of four candidates but 'we beat the bypass though, and it was built much further out.'

Cowles said she became conscious of the value of heritage buildings as an essential part of a community's quality of life.

Cowles joined the King Township Historical Society in 1974, thus beginning her ongoing volunteer activities.

She was involved with the King City Badminton Club, King Township Library Board, King City Seniors' Centre, Laskay Community Hall Board, Pottageville Tennis Club, King's Environmental Advisory Committee.

'My educational background in geography and mapping, and my involvement in creating the Oak Ridges Moraine Trail, have shaped my interest in rural planning and the sustainability of our beautiful rural Township.

'A supportive family, a general interest in the community I live in, and enjoyment of the outdoors, have been an excellent foundation for a happy and fulfilling life, whether paid or volunteer!'