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**Thompson's Dawn Dumas (surrounded by family) was honoured at last night's 21st Annual Volunteer Awards.**

## **Giving their heart & soul Awards honour our volunteers**

By David O'Brien

It takes heart and soul to be a volunteer, but Patrick T. Walker has added another ingredient to the mix -- guts.

Seven years ago, Walker, 45, was diagnosed with six major illnesses, including Lupus, degenerative bone disease, emphysema and the narrowing of the neurological paths. His health problems forced him to give up his house, which he had

spent the past 12 years renovating.

Rather than feel sorry for himself and wallow in self-pity, the Winnipeg artist immersed himself in volunteer work.

He coached youth bowling every weekend -- not easy for a man who has difficulty walking and breathing -- and donated hundreds of pieces of his own art as rewards and incentives to the young bowlers.

Walker has also donated his unique Celtic designs to other causes in the community, often under difficult circumstances. [<Continued>](#)

His achievements on behalf of others earned him two awards last night at the 21st Annual Volunteer Awards during a dinner ceremony at Canad Inns-Polo Park.

Walker's awards were among 30 in seven categories handed out by Lt.-Gov. Peter Liba, Premier Gary Doer, Mayor Glen Murray and others.

"Though he may not have volunteered with dozens of organizations or for three decades as other recipients, Patrick's touching story and completely selfless nature exemplifies the true spirit of volunteerism," Jamie Kraemer, past president of the Volunteer Centre of Winnipeg, told the crowd of 500.

Society, Kraemer said, simply wouldn't work without volunteers, who have an impact on every imaginable endeavour, including health, education, social services, youth, culture, sports and recreation, the arts and the environment.

"Volunteering is the most fundamental act of citizenship and philanthropy in our society," Kraemer said. "It is offering time, energy and skills of one's own free will."

Manitobans volunteer more time to charitable causes than any other province, Kraemer said.

The total amount of time volunteered added up to 43.7 million hours in 2002, the equivalent of nearly 23,000 full-time jobs, he said.

Liba said volunteers were "one of the province's greatest resources," a tribute heard over and over during the dinner ceremony.

Nevertheless, in a society that seems increasingly time poor, groups that rely on volunteers are facing a challenge in trying to keep up recruitments.

"Voluntary sector organizations in Manitoba and across Canada face increasing pressures that challenge their ability to thrive and prosper," said Helen Hayles, the volunteer centre's executive director.

Without their contributions, Hayles said, "the unique needs of individuals, groups and society at large are at risk."

Volunteers come from all walks of life and all ages, but they seem to be linked by a common desire to help others and make a difference.

Two teenagers were among those honoured last night.

Dawn Dumas received an award for her strong sense of leadership and dedication as vice-president of the Youth Aboriginal Council at R.D. Parker Collegiate in Thompson.

She's also deeply involved in her culture and community, and has sat on several committees.

Lisa Pao of Portage la Prairie is another example of the importance of youth volunteerism. Among other things, she volunteers more than 300 hours a year at the Pei-Ing Chinese School in Winnipeg, helping Chinese children learn the language of their ancestors.

The award for Outstanding Community Leadership went to well-known Winnipeg businessman Sanford Riley.

Despite being president and CEO of Richardson Financial Group, Riley still finds time to volunteer in the community, including serving as chancellor of the University of Winnipeg and chairman of the U of W Foundation.

Meanwhile, Hayles announced last night she was retiring after 20 years with the volunteer centre.

Dennis Dyck was named the new executive director.

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