

Sandra Lawn named Woman of the Year

By TRACEY TONG
Staff Writer

A longtime community leader was named the 2006 Girls Inc. Strong, Smart and Bold Woman of the Year at the second annual event held at the Brockville Country Club Tuesday.

With more than 140 people in attendance, the winner of last year's inaugural award Sherrie Davis helped to present the 2006 award to Sandra Lawn.

"It's an incredible honour," said Lawn, "and an inspiration too, when you hear about all the efforts in the hearts and minds of all these women."

Women in the community improve the quality of life in the area, said Lawn.

Currently, Lawn is the co-chairman of the Ontario Senior Games in 2007. She sits on three mental health boards in Kingston, two Queen's University boards, the board for the St. Lawrence Shakespeare Festival, the Ontario board of Nature Conservancy of Canada and is the chairman of the Prescott Library.

The mayor of Prescott for 15 years, Lawn is married to the current

mayor of Prescott, Robert Lawn. They have three daughters and six grandchildren.

"I'm blessed with good energy and good health," said Lawn, when asked how she keeps up with all of her activities.

"If I really believe in something, I'll give it my best," she said.

"I believe in the power of community. We are so incredibly fortunate. Our community is not too large and not too small. We can pull things together and make things happen here. It's very important for men and women, boys and girls to contribute to the community," she said.

Lawn was nominated by her Ontario Senior Games co-chairman, David Dargie.

Dargie, who has known Lawn since 1981, said that she was his first choice to help him co-chair the senior games. He said Lawn's can-do attitude, integrity and work ethic made her a role model, as well as an ideal candidate for woman of the year.

"It's a no-brainer, really, when it came down to who to nominate."

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The finalists for the awards were Olive Watts-Miller and Molly Faessen.

"I'm really honoured to be in such illustrious company," Watts-Miller said. "I know all of these ladies pretty well. They really should have had a tie and picked a name out of a hat, everyone was so deserving."

The 72-year-old Mallorytown resident – who currently volunteers for Girls Inc., the Brockville Women's Network, Career Services, Front of Yonge Communities in Bloom, the Mallorytown Residential Support Home, the Canadian Medical Health Association, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, the Youth Employment and Assistance Headquarters and the Brockville Amateur Radio Club – said that volunteering keeps her feeling young.

Organizations are very appreciative of their volunteers, she said.

"If you want to be loved, volunteer," she said.

Faesson, a Brownie leader for 48 years, is an active volunteer with the VON in Spencerville and Prescott for the past 10 years. She did not attend the event.

The skills and values that you gain as a youngster are ones that you use throughout your life, said keynote speaker Sharon Donnelly.

An Olympic triathlete who represented Canada at the Sydney Games in 2000, Donnelly spoke about overcoming obstacles, using examples from her own sporting careers, which spanned 10 years on the

international circuit.

"You might fail 99 per cent of the time and win one per cent of the time. But you become stronger because of it," said Donnelly.

Believe in yourself, set goals and make plans, surround yourself with a good team, make positive choices and have a positive attitude and be a good role model and a mentor – those are the rules that Donnelly lives by.

"Never assume you can't reach that biggest goal and never give up on your dreams. You might make it and you might not," she said. "Set that dream goal."

Donnelly set her own Olympic goals when she was 10 years old, she said.

Just prior to the Olympics in Athens in 2004, she tore a tendon in her shoulder.

She kept the injury and her ensuing surgery a secret, not wanting the other competitors to know that she had a weakness.

She trained hard and although she didn't get to go to Athens, she was proud of her accomplishments.

"I was proud of myself and I had learned how hard I could push myself," she said.

"I want to say it's an honour to live in a community of this size and see so many women are nominated," said master of ceremonies Carrie Hands. "I am so proud to live in this community."

"It's so motivating to see what these women have done," said Girls Inc. executive director Donna Perrin. "I'm just glad I wasn't on the committee that had to make a decision. It's such a diverse group."

This is by no means all the deserving women in the community, Perrin said.

"There are many more unsung heroes in our midst and we salute them," she said.

Karen McDonald-Hurley, who co-chaired the event along with Sophie Cushing, called it "awesome."

Although she said it was hard to say how it compared to last year's event, she said that she was impressed that this year produced a whole different batch of nominees.

"We thought we had them all," McDonald-Hurley said. "But it's all new names this year. And next year, there will be another 25, 30 names. There are so many amazing women out there. It could be your neighbour, or someone you walk by on the street."