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## Zonta Club honours four trailblazers

Four women—who embraced success through a philosophy of excellence and hardwork — were feted at a gala this week. The Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon which has been bestowing the coveted Women of Achievement awards (WOA) to four trailblazers from the community each year for some six years, selected four winners.

This year's recipients are: Marilyn Field, director of Salvation Army's Honeychurch Family Life Resource, Carole Berry, a community advocate and founder of Malton Neighbourhood Services, Mary Nanavati, principal of Fletcher's Meadow Secondary School (FMSS) and Stephanie Noronha, a young volunteer with the Ste. Louise Outreach Centre of Peel and Brampton Civic Hospital.

A panel of six judges reviewed the applications of some 20 nominees to select three WOA winners and one Young Women of Achievement Award recipient.

**Mary Nanavati:** As an English teacher, Nanavati has shared her love for literature and classics with hundreds of students over the years. Some will remember her as the demure principal that genuinely cared, others will recognize her for leadership skills. Since being at the helm of FMSS some five years ago, Nanavati has helped the school win the Premier's Safe Schools Award—twice. Also, the school's animation, film, music, technology, woodworking and robotics programs have won both prizes and rave reviews.

In her stellar 20-year teaching career, Nanavati has launched and led many initiatives. The ABC (Anti-bullying Collaborative) Network in Peel and a film festival for Peel students are two of many. She was the past president of Ontario ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) and a past editor of its journal. At the Zonta Club Brampton-Caledon's WOA Awards, Nanavati was flanked by a handful of people, responsible for shaping her destiny as an educator. "Zonta is all about women and the support we give each other," Nanavati said. "If I had to name one person who has been with me through my 20 years in Peel, it would have to be Linda Massey (a retired vice-principal in Peel). Linda was there for me right from the inception of me becoming a teacher...there were two other women at my table at the awards both of whom I am now mentoring. It's about giving back. I want to be the best principal that I can be. I'm here to serve the staff, students and the parents in this community."

**Marilyn Field:** For women and their children fleeing violence, the Salvation Army's Honeychurch Family Life Resource Centre (FLRC) is a quiet haven. The shelter doesn't get too many male visitors, but occasionally, a young man or two will stop by to share a milestone with Fields and thank the shelter for helping his mother and himself. These men are a proof of how timely help can save a family from the clutches of abuse. Fields has been with the Salvation Army for some 35 years. In 1980, she was invited to start a pilot program, called Victim Witness Assistance Program (VWAP). As part of the initiative, Fields worked with the police and Salvation Army volunteers to ensure any family that needed help received it within 30 minutes of the police officer arriving at a scene.

"When women and children come to us they're frightened, confused and hurting," Fields said. "When they walk in through our doors, I want them to feel as if they were in a home and not a shelter. So, when I hear from some of the men who come back to thank us, I rejoice."

**Carole Berry:** Despite retiring from work, Berry has been reluctant to let go of her volunteering stints. This year, besides the WOA award, the Brampton resident, also received an award of distinction from Credit Valley Conservation and Community Living Mississauga's Bonnie Yagar Award for outstanding volunteerism. It all started in the 70s after Berry received her training in addiction counselling. Her job led her to Toronto's Jane-Finch area and then to Malton. In Malton, Berry was appalled to see residents had no access to community services.

"I noticed issues of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and racism in Malton when I moved there," she said. "So, I very actively sought out funding, found volunteers, introduced training programs and gathered people around. I learned at that time that the need to create pride in both ourselves and the community was the most important thing."

In the 80s, the Rotary Clubs in the GTA were male-dominated entities, but this did not deter Berry from joining one. Berry was not only the first woman to join the Mississauga-Airport Rotary Club, but she later became its first female president.

**Stephanie Noronha:** (Young WOA): Some five years ago, when Noronha, 19, decided to launch a food drive along with her sister and some friends, she had no clue how to capitalize on the resources available in the community. The goal of the food drive was to collect one tonne of food, but when the sisters actually tried to put their plan to action, they ran into roadblocks. Noronha realized the sum of the initiative was much greater than "two kids" wanting to do good. They never made the mistake again. Since that first Thanksgiving Food Drive, Noronha and her sister Stacey, 17, estimate they have collected some 32,000 lbs. of food items for the Ste. Louise Outreach Centre of Peel. This has been possible through reaching out to the community and including them in their plans.

"My parents have always told me not to focus on the money, but the journey," said Noronha, a third year life sciences

student at McMaster University. "They told me to focus on the people I can reach out and that doing it for money will not give me long-term satisfaction. So, that's what inspired me. My parents are my pillars and all credit goes to them..."

Proceeds from this year's WOA gala will benefit Rapport, a counselling agency for at-risk youth and Our Place Peel, a shelter for homeless youth.