

Zonta Club Brampton - Caledon announces its 2013 Women of Achievement winners



Winners take it all

Photo by Bryon Johnson

From L to R: Mai Nguyen (business/professions and trades), Shirley Ellison (community service), Dr. Susan Cooper (health, science and technology) and Abena Addo, (Young Women of Achievement) were crowned this year's Women of Achievement at the Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon's Women of Achievement Awards on Nov. 21

Brampton Guardian

By [Radhika Panjwani](#)

BRAMPTON — Four women, four extraordinary stories.

The Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon crowned four women—Mai Nguyen (business/professions and trades), Shirley Ellison (community service), Dr. Susan Cooper (Health science and technology) and Abena Addo (Young Women of Achievement)— as the 2013 Women of Achievement (WOA) winners.

The awards were presented at a glittering gala in Brampton last night.

Each year, Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon, recognizes the work of women who exemplify traits of enterprise, leadership and community service. Nominees are selected from all walks-of-life. This year, the awards garnered eight nominations, explained Elayne McDermid, member of the Zonta Club of Brampton-Caledon and spokesperson for the organization.

“Each our eight nominees have opened doors for other women by being role-models and inspiration,” she said. “These women have supported and improved lives of women everywhere. They have also demonstrated that you can be a leader and advocate for women not just in the community but across the globe.”

Mai Nguyen: Has worked tirelessly to support the Vietnamese community in Canada through her leadership and fundraising work with the Vietnamese Association of Toronto (VAT) while serving as a role model for newcomers. Through her work with VAT, Nguyen, 33, a Bramptonian helped organize the Vietnamese pavilion at Carabram, Brampton's multicultural festival.

"I came to Canada at a young age and had the opportunity to be raised and educated here," said Nguyen who runs a successful marketing company. "But, there was always a part of me that wanted to stay connected to my roots. I realized the only way to do that was by volunteering, getting involved in the community and helping preserve my heritage..."

Dr. Susan Cooper: A Brampton resident is a role-model for women wanting to pursue a career in optometry. Through her work with the World Council of Optometry (WCO) and the International Association for the Prevention of Blindness, Cooper has promoted gender equality and empowered women not only in Canada but across the world. She has also helped dozens of newcomers to Canada by being part of a Optometrist Bridging Program designed to help internationally trained optometrists.

"It was always instilled in me that it's important to give back," she said adding her children are now doing the same. "There are so many areas in the world that need vision care. So much of it is avoidable blindness. A lot of my work as president of WCO is to work with governments and get optometry regulated in schools."

Shirley Ellison: A retired educator, Ellison, 79, brings energy and zeal to the development and promotion of Z-Club, or junior Zonta Clubs aimed at high school students. The well-known teacher, chartered the first Z-Club in 1986 at Mayfield Secondary School. Since then, 15 more schools have been inducted into the fold with five waiting in the wings. Ellison is a strong advocate of Zonta Club's birthing kits. These kits help women in developing countries to deliver babies in non-sterile conditions. The items— assembled by students in Canada — are huge help for midwives in third-world countries who struggle daily to deliver babies.

"Service is one of Zonta's great motto," said Ellison who retired from teaching in 1996. "When I heard about Z-Clubs, I was at first intrigued and thought it would be a perfect place for me work. I was a kindergarten teacher for many years and loved it, but once I got in the high schools and started working with the teenagers, I found they gave me just as much joy. They have given me so many awards and rewards."

Abena Addo: Believes doing community work is her duty and despite juggling a dozen other things, Addo, 21, has found time to; host charity soccer games, introduce affordable basketball camps, raise money for an orphanage in her birth country, Ghana and organize several community events to engage youth. Addo said she learned the joy of volunteering by sitting in the knees of her father who through his charity helped raise money and supplies for needy schools in Ghana.

"I make time for volunteering despite a hectic schedule because I am obliged to do so," said Addo, a Bramptonian studying environmental health science at McGill University. "I remember going to Ghana some years ago to play soccer at a school my father was supporting. I had all my soccer gear on, but when I went to play with the children, I was shocked because the children had nothing. I couldn't understand how you could play soccer with no shoes. There's a feeling you get when you give and there's absolutely nothing else that can come close to that..."