



Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House

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For Immediate Release

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House Senior Mentors Program Wins United Way Celebration of Community Award

Jan. 18, 2008 (Vancouver, BC) — Vancouver's Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House has been awarded a Celebration of Community Award at the seventh United Way of the Lower Mainland (UWLM) Community Spirit Awards. The event was attended by over 1000 people working with, volunteering for, or donating to organizations associated with the UWLM.

Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House, part of the Association of Neighbourhood Houses (ANH), won the \$2500 award for the **Senior Mentors Making Connections for Immigrant Communities**, a program that brings together volunteer seniors with local seniors to combat isolation due to language and cultural barriers, poverty, and other challenges. Mentors reflect a cross-section of the multicultural face of the neighbourhood MPNH serves, including the Chinese, Vietnamese, Filipino, and Latin American communities. Activities include a very popular Mah Jong group, line dancing, outings, and other events. Volunteer mentor Esther Lam, who launched the Mah Jong group, says she joined the program because she wanted to help seniors: "It's a joy to be able to serve them; in a way it's also serving myself." Retired nurse Maggie Lam says it makes her very happy to see people enjoying themselves. She started taking English and senior's computer classes at MPNH two years ago and volunteered with the Senior Mentors Making Connections program last May because she felt "the House had helped me, and I wanted to give something back." Ms. Lam also finds being involved in the program helps her improve her English skills. Mentor Jenny Yu says volunteering "is a chance to make new friends and learn about other cultures." The program began last spring and has seen as many as 50 people attend some of the events. Mentors spread the word about the program to people they knew, encouraging seniors from different cultural groups to participate. Because language can often be an obstacle in full participation in one's neighbourhood mentors reached out especially to their communities of origin. And some were persistent in bringing new people in. Program Coordinator Linda Comba describes how the program helped one senior: "One of our mentors knew about an 82-year-old woman who was completely alone, spending day after day by herself. Our volunteer finally encouraged the woman to come out to the program, and now she has a place to come to and people to socialize



Association of Neighbourhood
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with.” Another participant said she had never thought of coming to MPNH before the program, and now she comes to the Mah Jong group and has even taken up line dancing. Comba says the Senior Mentors Making Connections program has been a lifesaver for the mentors as well. “It’s important for them — many of them are retired — to be doing something meaningful.”

The Spirit Awards are United Way’s most prestigious campaign awards. They recognize “the exceptional commitment, leadership and creativity shown by hundreds of organizations and thousands of volunteers.” Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House Executive Director Jocelyne Hamel reflects on the importance of the award to MPNH: “We are thrilled to have been recognized with this award. The Senior Mentors program reflects many of the underlying values and principles of how neighbourhood houses operate, specifically capacity building, social inclusion, community engagement and the democratic principle. Volunteer immigrant seniors further contribute to both capacity building and social inclusion of other immigrant seniors through their outreach efforts. Seniors themselves make decisions about the types of activities and services they want to lead and participant in. We are honoured to provide programs like these for our community.” Spirit Awards are presented annually at the Scotiabank & United Way Community Spirit Awards in January, a popular breakfast celebration for everyone involved in the United Way Campaign.

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