

Volunteering gives meaning to Ruby's life



Staff photo by Fred Loek

Ruby West is Trillium Health Centre's longest serving volunteer with 56 years of service to the hospital and its patients. Ruby was hard at work at the reception desk of the Critical Care Family Support Waiting Room last Thursday.

By: John Bkila

April 26, 2009 09:52 AM - Volunteer work has been in her blood since day one, says 88-year-old Ruby West.

West has served as a volunteer at Trillium Health Centre for 56 years, spending her Tuesdays at the Toronto West site and her Thursdays at the Queensway site in Mississauga.

Since moving to Mississauga in the early 1950s, volunteering at Trillium has been her passion, she said.

At the hospital's Mississauga site, West volunteers in the Critical Care Family Waiting Room.

"You have to feel for the families in stress while they're waiting for their loved ones and stand by them," she said.

West acts as a liaison between the critical department and the patient's families and friends, getting information to them as it develops.

West's late husband, Kenneth, was one of the founders of Trillium Health Centre, formerly known as Queensway General Hospital, in the 1950s.

Her career as a hospital volunteer began during the Second World War, when she volunteered as a nursing assistant at St. Joseph's Hospital Centre in Toronto.

"The men were overseas and I had to do something here. Health care was always in my mind," she said. "I've always wanted to be in health care. You gain the feeling of contributing something. I've also gained a lot from knowing the other volunteers and knowing how important they are to hospitals. I've enjoyed working with them."

June Kowalczyk, another volunteer at the Trillium Health Centre, said West has been her inspiration.

"This is a great lady that deserves to be recognized by the community for her years of service," said Kowalczyk. "She is well loved and respected by anyone who has had the pleasure of meeting her."

Over her years of volunteering at Trillium, West has been a director of volunteers, a member of the board of governors and is now a member of the community advisory council.

"Volunteering has given meaning to my life and provided me with a sense of accomplishment and a rapport with the many other volunteers who also contribute their time and energies to the health care system," said West. And her efforts have not gone unnoticed.

Trillium held an award ceremony in 2003 at the Oasis Banquet Hall in Mississauga to recognize West's first 50 years of service.

"I just hope the hospital has gained from my services as much as I have gained from volunteering for them," West said. "And I realize being able to contribute to the community makes life worthwhile."

West, who at 88 is the same age as Mayor Hazel McCallion, said Mississauga's long-standing municipal leader has inspired her to keep her going.

"I'm very privileged to be able to volunteer ... and I'll continue doing it for as long as my health holds."