

She's the woman of the century

Marielle Demorest, 82, praised for community service

[Philip Raphael](#) / Richmond News

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Marielle Demorest receives her award from former Gov. Gen. Michaëlle Jean. Photo submitted

After just a few days away visiting a friend, Marielle Demorest had a slew of messages on her voicemail when she returned home.

And by the very next day, last Wednesday, her schedule included at least four meetings.

At 82, you might think she would like to slow things down. But she wouldn't have it any other way.

"Being involved in my community, it gives me a reason to get up every day," she said. "It's something I've always done."

It's that unwavering desire that has earned Demorest a distinctive award in the nation's capital.

She was among two Richmond women among the 100 chosen from across Canada to receive the title of Woman of the Century — 1914 to 2014 by the Alliance des Femmes de la Francophonie Canadienne.

The other was Renée Popov Watters, a leader who has volunteered at the provincial and the national levels for the past 40 years.

"I was pretty flattered to be included in that group," said Demorest, who among her list of activities in Richmond includes being a founding member of the Richmond Women's Resource Centre in 1976 and Richmond's Volunteer of the Year in 2001.

"I think people back then knew there was a real need for that type of facility," Demorest said, adding much of her motivation to be community active comes from her parents.

Growing up as the seventh child of 17 on a farm in the eastern township of Waterville — about 10 miles from Sherbrooke in southeastern Quebec — being involved meant things in the community got accomplished.

“When the community needed a school, my mother helped get a petition going to get the government to fund it. And when the local police needed some extra help, my parents were there to get the community behind it,” Demorest said. “If you didn’t do that, things did not happen.”

When she “stopped off” in Richmond back in 1958 — during a supposed worldwide excursion of adventure and learning — Demorest adopted the same, community-focused principles after setting down roots here and getting married.

“When I was bringing up my kids here in Richmond, which is such a beautiful place to live, I got so much help from people that I had to give something back,” she said. “And at that time, there weren’t a lot of services for families here.”

Today, her calendar is still filled with important dates and times with groups including the RWRC — where she helps immigrants learn English — the local legion, and Richmond Garden Club.

“She’s a pretty special lady,” said RWRC president Colleen Glyn. “And we are absolutely thrilled she got the recognition she deserved.”

Demorest said she was honoured to received the award certificate from former Governor General Michaëlle Jean in Ottawa, but was quick to add that her commitment to the community was merely part of her everyday life.

“It was normal for me to be involved,” she said. “Today, with the very busy lives families lead, setting aside that kind of time is much harder. It’s just the way things are now.”