

Warden presents 2021 Awards of Excellence

Lanark County Council honoured two people for their outstanding contributions to the community at the council meeting Wednesday evening as part of the 2021 Awards of Excellence.

The Awards of Excellence recognize and honour citizens or organizations that have made a significant and/or extraordinary contribution to Lanark County. This year council recognized Cliff Bennett of Carleton Place in the categories of Volunteerism and Community Service, and Adam Dowdall of Carleton Place in Heritage and Ecology.

“Since they were established in 2005, these awards have provided Lanark County Council with an opportunity to recognize local residents and express our gratitude for the contributions they have made to enhance the quality of life in our communities,” said Warden Christa Lowry (Mississippi Mills Mayor). “These volunteers give so much of their time and, by pursuing their passions and sharing their talents, inspire others as well.”

The awards program began as a way to recognize recipients for contributions to the county at large or in at least two municipalities. It was developed to say thank you to citizens of Lanark County, to provide community recognition and visibility, to support citizens for their contributions and to inspire further community service.

Cliff Bennett, currently of Carleton Place, but a decades-long resident of Mississippi Mills, was nominated by Valerie Wilkinson, who says he “has been so active in the community so often and for so long that it is difficult to know where to begin. His activities range from politics to sports to environment with much dedication to students and young people.” Wilkinson highlighted Bennett’s work in Scouts Canada for 30 years, including the launch of a group at the Ontario Hospital School and eventually becoming District Commissioner and receiving the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee Medal and Scouting’s Medal of Meritorious Service.

Bennett began teaching in 1967 and worked with students with disabilities, involving students in many different clubs. He was actively involved in tourism activities in Lanark County, serving as president of the Lanark County Tourism Association, and became involved in municipal politics in the 1990s, serving as deputy reeve for the former Ramsay Township from 1994 to 1997 during the amalgamation period when it became part of Mississippi Mills. He served on the Ontario Heritage Board for four years as director and vice president, helping to create the new Ontario Heritage Act. He was also active in the sporting community, including the Carleton Place Canoe Club, Almonte Curling Club and Lawn Bowling Club.

Bennett is well known as a keen environmentalist and for his work to launch the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN) Club in 1988. He created an environmental education program to bring nature into classrooms, as well as a bursary fund to provide grants to environmental students – awarding \$16,700 since 2007 to 21 students graduating from high school.

In a letter of support, MVFN President Linda McCormick said “Mr. MVFN” has been a director of the club numerous times and served as president for several terms. The club has grown to more

than 350 members since it began. Bennett was instrumental in creating two guides – *Bird Watching Journeys in Lanark County* and *Canoe and Kayak Journeys in Lanark County* – both of which are widely distributed by municipalities and businesses to promote tourism. She noted Bennett continues to be a director-at-large and a committee member and, at age 89, is leading bird walks from his retirement residence along a walkway by the river. He also raised funds for bird feeders near the buildings so less-mobile residents can also enjoy bird watching.

In another letter of support, John Edwards described Bennett as “a consistent contributor to the quality of life of the communities he has lived in: Carleton Place, Beckwith and Mississippi Mills,” adding: “Cliff is an irresistible ‘force of nature’ who is constantly organizing and coordinating people to work together to improve their life experience and/or improve their surroundings....His optimism and enthusiasm has easily affected the lives of thousands of people wherever he lives.”

Adam Dowdall of Carleton Place was nominated by Jayne Munro-Ouimet, the president of the Lanark County Genealogical Society, for his efforts to bring Lanark County’s cultural heritage to life through his hobby of metal detecting.

Munro-Ouimet indicated Dowdall has been fascinated with unearthing and preserving items from an early age, and he has documented and displayed artifacts at many community events. Through speaking engagements and his Facebook page, Dowdall has motivated others with new hobby ideas. At the same time, he educates about location guiding, environmental awareness and equipment and techniques used.

“Digging in the county’s dirt – sometimes it is more than scratching the surface – Adam helps us understand what life was like in a specific time period and what was valued in society,” Munro-Ouimet says. “He brings us the county history just below our feet.” Over many years he has found numerous artifacts from the pre-settlement and settlement eras.

A letter of support from Kate Hurdis, Director of Society Development with the Lanark County Genealogical Society, notes Dowdall has found lost keepsakes, coins, jewels and items of great historical significance, including a flint spearhead dated to be 3,000 years old, of interest to Indigenous neighbours at Golden Lake. “Adam is a great asset to our local historical-minded societies and local museums. He brings a renewed interest in people searching their own properties and looking for local historical artifacts, provides guidance to those who wish to be involved with metal detecting and the proper procedures in collecting treasure,” she says.

Tim and Rosemary Campbell, independent museum professionals, stated in a letter of support that Dowdall’s “voyages of discovery into Lanark County landscapes have unearthed pertinent specimens of material culture that bear witness to the area settlement roots and history, mostly forgotten or unknown by its local residents.” The Campbells note Dowdall conscientiously documents and cares for the items he finds, “pursues his trade in ground metal detecting diligently and ethically,” and that he is respectful of the traditional territory upon which Indigenous peoples reside, as well as those who came after. They note his “contribution to heritage awareness in this area has a long-term impact in defining our community’s cultural landscape” and applaud his efforts to show his collection and to mentor those keen to take up metal detecting.

Lowry congratulated the recipients for their contributions. "These volunteers are role models who, through their actions and incredible generosity, have touched many lives. We sincerely thank you both for leaving such a positive legacy in Lanark County."

Awards of Excellence recipients are recognized on a plaque in the county administration building, as well as on the county website at www.lanarkcounty.ca and in notices in local newspapers.

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For more information, please contact:

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Presentation photos available at

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/6qdbiom4ozny3p9/AAClqkGsgjEHHK3UWG6dXm9ea?dl=0>