

Award honours work on disabilities

Head of UW centre among nominees

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Author: FRANK ETHERINGTON

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Helping to create an equitable learning environment for hundreds of disabled students has been a personal and inspirational learning experience for Rose Padacz.

Padacz, the director of the University of Waterloo's office for persons with disability, is among 28 nominees in an upcoming awards ceremony organized by the Waterloo Region Independent Living Centre. The awards will be presented Thursday night at Kitchener's Country Hills community centre on Rittenhouse Road.

Working closely with the centre and other community services, Padacz and her staff have developed comprehensive support systems for disabled people at UW. Padacz, director since 1996, said there were 33 disabled students listed with her office in 1984. Currently, that number is more than 1,300 out of a total student enrolment of about 25,000.

She said her eight full-time staff strive to create equal opportunities and access for disabled students or faculty on campus.

"We want to minimize disability and maximize opportunity," she said.

Padacz said her staff work with students on everything from restricted mobility to psychological problems and learning disabilities.

Some of those assisted are quadriplegics while others are blind or deaf.

English is the second language for one gifted student who is blind and uses a guide dog. She is completing a master's degree and plans to go for her PhD, Padacz said.

"We're all very inspired when we see something like that . . . it's a learning experience for all of us."

UW programs to help disabled students include accessible housing complete with attendant-care support staff -- a joint project with the Independent Living Centre. A UW van can take students around campus and connects with nearby Wilfrid Laurier University.

The university also provides laboratories staffed by experts who provide adaptive computer services. A team of professionals, support staff and volunteers creates a comprehensive learning environment and oversees special examinations for students.

Dianne Boston-Nyp, the Independent Living Centre's education- promotion director, said the annual awards celebrate work by people like Padacz to improve the lives of disabled people.

She said national statistics indicate that more than 70,000 people have some form of disability in Waterloo Region. Half of them have what are considered mild disabilities while about 3,300 have severe disabilities. Handicaps can include inability to work, mental illness as well as mobility, eating and reading problems, she said.

"By the year 2020, demographics show the number of people with some form of disability in Waterloo Region will be higher as the baby-boom population ages."

Individual award nominees are:

Jonathan Arnold, Lorene Benoy, Donna Buckner, Joanne Cripps, Lesley Lynne-Davies, Sharon Fournier, Mary Karen Gosselink, Peter Klinkman, Sandi Krause, Sanjita Laing, Noel McInnis, Jadranka Mocevic, Lorna Van Mossel, Joyce Nieuwesteeg, Rose Padacz, Diane Peters, Karen Redman, Paula Saunders, David Toye, Christine Turcotte and Shirley Weinert.

Other nominees:

The City of Kitchener, Grand River Transit, Kitchener's Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, John McDonald Architect, Waterloo district chapter of the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Westheights Public School instructors and the YMCA Cambridge.

[Illustration]

Photo: MATHEW McCARTHY, RECORD STAFF / Rose Padacz, director of the Office for Persons with Disabilities at the University of Waterloo, says her goal is to "minimize disability and maximize opportunity."

Credit: RECORD STAFF

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