



For Immediate Release

## **Big Brothers Big Sisters serving Brant, Brantford, Haldimand & Norfolk win BIG Awards at National Convention**

August 6, 2009

Simcoe, ON-Big Brothers & Big Sisters serving Brant, Brantford, Haldimand & Norfolk (BBBSBHN) were BIG winners at the 2009 Big Brothers Big Sisters of Canada (BBBSC) National Awards Ceremony held July 2<sup>nd</sup> at the BMO Institute for Learning in Toronto. Every year during the National Convention awards are given to Staff, Alumni, Innovators & Supporters of the cause-ensuring every child who needs a mentor, has a mentor.

This year BBBSBHN were BIG winners taking home two awards: the Cliff Hall Alumni Award which recognizes an active, long term alumnus who demonstrates significant commitment to forwarding the mentoring movement & the President's Commendation, which is given at the local staff level to an outstanding staff member who has made an exceptional contribution to the development, growth or sustainability of the Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) program.

This year's Cliff Hall Alumni Award was given to Gord and Ellen Guenther who, not unlike Cliff Hall, have a long time history of over 20 years with the Big Brothers Big Sisters movement. As one of the first Big Couple matches with the Hamilton agency beginning in 1987, they have made a lasting impression on the many children who have been fortunate enough to have them as mentors. Since that first match, Gord & Ellen have mentored five Littles and their concern & commitment to each as an individual is apparent through the relationships that they have maintained with four of their Littles.

Sadly, Gord died suddenly in his sleep in November 2008. At his funeral, at Ellen's side were three of their Little Brothers, Gerry-with his former Little Brother Andrew who is 21, and is in the process of applying to be a Big Brother-Steve and Joe. When spending time with their Little Brothers, Gord and Ellen instilled the values of trust, generosity, commitment & hard work. These qualities shone through their former Little Gerry at Gord's funeral, when he committed to being there as a mentor and role model for Joe. Ellen has also committed to being Joe's Big Sister, even through her grief and loss. Ellen and Joe continue to participate in all local BBBS events and are dedicated to helping keep Gord's legacy alive with us here at BBBS. "I am so thankful for all of the hard work that happens at Big Brothers and Big Sisters and I am very proud to be a part of it," said Ellen Guenther while sharing her story and acceptance speech with attendees of National Convention.

The President's Commendation Award went to Executive Director of our local agency, Patti O'Reilly, who was nominated by CEO of BBBSC, Bruce MacDonald. Through Patti's hard work and determination, the expansion of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Haldimand Norfolk to include Brant County and Brantford was a major success for the agency and the communities that we serve. Mentoring the children/youth of our communities has been Patti's

number one priority for twenty years. Patti came to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Haldimand Norfolk in October of 1989 as the new Executive Director and hasn't looked back since. She has been key in implementing many new programs for BBBS including, being one of the first agencies to pilot both Go Girls and Go Guys, bringing the Cops for Kids program from its homegrown roots here in Haldimand Norfolk and sharing it with agencies across the country, as well as helping implement the In School Mentoring program.

Ask Patti and she will tell you that everything we do here is a "team effort" but that team effort has always had the guidance, support and stability of its backbone...her!! We are all so proud of Patti and her accomplishments; she has helped make the BBBS movement become a cause for all to support. Her energy, enthusiasm and love for BBBS have made a huge impact on the hundreds of children served by our local agency.

Big Brothers Big Sisters is the leading child and youth serving organization providing mentoring programs across the country. Providing support to more than 1000 Canadian communities, our over 140 local agencies offer the service that the organization was founded on, one-to-one matching. Men and women (age 18 or older) give of their time to become a mentor to a youngster who can greatly benefit from having an adult role model to look up to.

Big Brothers and Big Sisters offer a number of different community programs and fundraising events that you can take part in. Whether you have one hour a week or want to take part in one of the annual fundraisers – it all makes a difference! Call today at (519) 426-3121/800 268 8784 or go online at [www.bbbshn.ca](http://www.bbbshn.ca) and see how you can help us "Share the Dream".

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