

Elva Corless – “Grandmother of Recycling”

Elva Corless was a long-time advocate for recycling and environmental causes in Smiths Falls, a tireless supporter of her church and a key community builder.

Elva kickstarted the recycling movement here in Smiths Falls in 1979 by organizing a monthly recycling depot at Trinity United Church, along with the Interchurch Women. The paper, glass and tin collected originally just filled a car trunk, but then as word spread in the community, filled multiple dumpsters and involved dozens of volunteers. All this happened before the Blue Box recycling program came to Smiths Falls and Lanark County.

Her interest in recycling and led her to be one of the founding members of the Rideau Environmental Action League (REAL), a local non-profit environmental group, in 1989. Elva served as president of REAL from 1997 to 2000. She was a key organizer and volunteer for the town’s first Reuse Centre in 1990, which operated in space donated by the town on Beckwith St. N. The Reuse Centre later developed into the REAL Deal Reuse Store which opened in 2006 and is still going strong at 85 William St. W. She was an enthusiastic organizer of Waste Reduction Week and Composting Week events each year, and was an key player in Pitch In Smiths Falls, an annual spring litter cleanup that continues today.

Elva was also a member of an earlier group called CLEAN, the County of Lanark Environmental Action Network . She also served on the Public Liaison Committee for the Waste Management Master Plan Study for Smiths Falls and Lanark County in the early nineties. Her work in recycling was recognized by the Recycling Council of Ontario in 1995 with a special award.

Elva made sure that her church, church family and community were informed and involved in all aspects of care of the earth, its resources and social justice issues, too.

Trinity United Church (TUC), Smiths Falls, benefited from Elva’s strong faith. She worked tirelessly to raise funds for the church and the Mission and Service Fund. She was the founder of the Interchurch Women and the Friday Prayer Group, and held leadership roles with the United Church Women (UCW). She was renowned for her homemade donuts or “Elvabits”, which she sold, near and far, in support of her church and its work.

Elva supported social justice issues on many levels through the World Day of Prayer, White Ribbon Against Pornography, Peal for Peace, as well as the Social Justice Committee and the Community Outreach Committee at TUC. In 2000, after walking in the Women’s March in Ottawa, she was instrumental in lobbying her local MP regarding the concerns raised by women from across the country.

Elva made the members of the Church more active and informed, benefiting Smiths Falls and the wider community. She was recognized with a Canada 125 medal in 1992, and was named Smiths Falls Citizen of the Year in 1991.

In appreciation of all her environmental efforts, Elva was name Director Emerita of REAL in 2008. Elva lived her whole life in Smiths Falls, but in her final years moved to Angus, Ontario in to live with her daughter. A granite stone was placed in her honour along Evergreen Avenue in Victoria Park in 2012. It was inscribed “Grandmother of Recycling” to recognize her pioneering work on recycling and her commitment to Waste Reduction. Elva was able to make the trip back to Smith Falls for the presentation. Elva passed away in 2015, but she is still remembered for her dedication to her church, family, friends and community and her tireless efforts on environmental issues.

Submitted by REAL
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