

Happy, proud tears from youngest of eight women honoured
By Natalie Alcoba
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Hillary Smith sat at her table, and tears welled up in her eyes.

They were happy, proud tears.

At 18, she was the youngest recipient in a group of women who were honoured last night for their contributions to Hamilton and the privilege wasn't lost on her.

"It made me realize I want to continue to volunteer for the rest of my life," said Smith, after receiving the Women in Youth Leadership award last night at the Convention Centre.

Eight women received awards from the Status of Women Committee, for contributions to public affairs, health or sports and fitness, the workplace, communications, community service, youth leadership and mentoring.

The Honourable Jean Augustine, Minister of State (Multiculturalism and Status of Women) handed out the awards.

Smith was recognized for work in a peer mentor program that matches current high school students with incoming ones, along with organizing toy drives and tutoring.

Mary Pocius, recipient of the award in public affairs, described it as "humbling".

Pocius has dedicated time to revitalizing the downtown core, is vocal at city council and has been involved in organizing several events, such as The Mustard Festival, Ferguson Station Rib Row and the World Cycling Championships.

She said people often marvel at how passionate she is about Hamilton. "If you're not full of passion for the city you live in, maybe you're living in the wrong city," she said.

Melanie McFarlane's commitment to encouraging women to play hockey earned her the Women in Sports and Fitness award.

Liz Weaver, Hamilton YWCA CEO and last night's recipient of the Women in the Workplace award, called herself a "quiet leader" who is more comfortable working behind the scenes. She honoured the work of past president Jill Rumble who recently passed away.

Activist and artist Lyla Miklos thanked her "very extended family" after she accepted her award in the communications category. Lyla is a member of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Transgender community and was described as a "strong voice and communicator".

Two women won in the Community Service category.

Elizabeth Bechtel has worked proactively to reduce problems between students and residents in Westdale.

Joanne Ruggieri has been active for more than 20 years in groups such as Scouts Canada, and the Canadian Diabetes Association.

Myra James, a member of the Hamilton Police Service for 16 years, was honoured in the Women who Mentor category. She takes time to mentor students at Bishop Ryan High School and other female officers.