

VERA LYN PERDON GIVES BACK DURING PANDEMIC

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Giving back to the community has always been a passion for Vera Lyn Perdon.

Dating back to her high school days, the 36-year-old Toronto police officer has always found time to volunteer in some way.

When the COVID-19 pandemic took a serious turn in the city last spring, as businesses were forced to close and limits were put in place on social gatherings, an opportunity arose for Perdon to combine her passion for giv-

ing back with a longtime hobby: sewing.

After a conversation with her sister, an occupational health nurse, Perdon decided to sew masks for front-line workers and for those who did not have access to the protective equipment.

As time went on, her work snowballed into a community-wide effort that has seen several members join her "6ix Sewess" club, which has donated more than 3,500 masks as of early September.

Perdon's initiative is the reason why she has been named a



Vera Lyn Perdon

Star Metroland Media 2020 Urban Hero Award winner, Judge's Selection.

"There's no real end. The need is far greater than what we can produce," she said. "So you just keep going. Sometimes you kind of feel like you're a factory worker just sewing these masks."

One of Perdon's nominators, a volunteer in 6ix Sewess, described her as "an excellent Urban Hero."

"Every week, she has volunteered her time to pick up completed masks from a team of volunteers; she sources hard to get fabrics and sewing materials from local residents and businesses," her nominator wrote. "She has assembled and man-

aged a great group of women volunteers and worked tirelessly to promote community health during the COVID-19 pandemic."

Perdon said she'll stop when masks are no longer needed.

"What drives me is the sense of community. Not only do I live and work in this community, but I also volunteer in this community and even though you don't know it's me and you don't know I'm a police officer, you know that I'm somewhat contributing in a positive way," she said. "You don't really think about it, but you just hope you can do something in a positive light."

HEALTH
WINNER

PANDEMIC BRINGS SHARMI JOSHI'S SELFLESSNESS TO FOREFRONT

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The COVID-19 pandemic has cut at Torontonians — it has taken lives, shattered dreams and forced longtime businesses to close.

While it's easy to dwell on the negatives — COVID-19 has brought out a lot of good from those who call Toronto home.

One of those examples is North York's Sharmi Joshi. No stranger to volunteerism, the 68-year-old independent consultant used the pandemic as an opportunity to give back to the city.

When COVID-19 became a serious threat last spring, Joshi noticed front-line workers were running low on personal protective equipment — specifically face masks.

So, she made a call to a friend who sews and asked if they could create masks for donation, if she provided the materials.

Months later, her initial call to her friend has morphed into a team of volunteers based throughout the GTA that has donated more than 16,000 non-medical, double-sided, cotton, washable and reusable face masks, and more than 500 cro-

cheted ear protectors made from yarn.

Joshi co-ordinates a team of 18 sewing volunteers, 12 courier volunteers and six of her friends who help her raise the funds to keep giving these masks for free.

Her work has led to her winning a Star Metroland Media 2020 Urban Hero Award in the Social Issues category, People's Choice.

"I feel COVID has helped us revive ... our skills that we had lost," Joshi said. "It gave a lot (of) life and meaning to the people at a time where everything was gloom and doom."

Her nominator, a volunteer



Sharmi Joshi

with her COVID-19 support group, described Joshi as a "big inspiration and a motivator."

"Sharmi Joshi is a very vi-

brant, caring, successful and a leading personality among our community," her nominator wrote.

"She loves to encourage and motivate our youth to understand life and deal with all obstacles with a positive view in mind."

For Joshi, she said she couldn't have won this Urban Hero award on her own.

"I've brought everyone together, but I have not stitched a single mask," she said. "To me, I want to dedicate this entire award not to me, but to the people who actually worked behind the scenes."

SOCIAL ISSUES
WINNER

COVID-19 CAN'T STOP SEEMA DAVID FROM FEEDING THE HUNGRY

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Scarborough's Seema David admits running a soup kitchen isn't easy at the best of times; you just never know where funding will come from, week to week.

Throw in a global pandemic that impacted operations and supporters, and increased the number of hungry people, and you have a recipe for disaster.

But David never let any of that stop her. After all, there are hungry people in her community.

"Starting a soup kitchen, was



Seema David

a seed, I believe, God put in my heart and it's not something I could just let go," she said.

"It's been a challenge. But nothing of value comes easy."

The founder of 5n2 (formerly 5n2 Kitchens), and a small team of volunteers, has been feeding people in east Scarborough through the pandemic, never closing once. In fact, the non-profit organization has increased the scope of its services in recent months, becoming more than just a soup kitchen, hence the name change.

David's dedication has earned her a Star Metroland Media 2020 Urban Hero Award, Judge's Selection.

Through the pandemic, the

organization has been providing 1,500 meals and 400 grocery bags to people each week.

David, who immigrated from India with her husband and children back in 2007, was surprised when she saw poverty and hunger here.

There were plenty of soup kitchens downtown, and she realized there was a need for one in her own neighbourhood.

In 2013, she partnered with Global Kingdom Ministries, where she was a parishioner, and began using the church's kitchen to prepare meals that she gave to residents in a low-in-

come building.

At first, she used the kitchen once a week for a few hours, but her operation grew and she was in there five days a week, outgrowing the kitchen's capacity. She had to decide, shut the operation down or commit to paying rent for a bigger space, knowing she had no consistent stream of funders. In 2019, she went all in, finding a kitchen in a warehouse close to the church.

"God's been faithful, because every time we've taken a step out in faith, he's backed us," she said.

To learn more, visit 5n2.ca.

SOCIAL ISSUES
WINNER