

Recipient surprised by award



Photo/MICHAEL TENAGLIA

Amy Go is a YWCA Women of Distinction award winner.

Amy Go a 2009 YWCA Women of Distinction

By FANNIE SUNSHINE
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Amy Go thought it was a mistake when it was announced she was a recipient of a 2009 YWCA Women of Distinction Award.

"I thought if I was going to win, they probably confused me with my sister, who is a well known human rights and immigration lawyer," the North York resident joked.

Go, the winner of the Access and Opportunity award, said she's accepting the recognition on behalf of the tireless individuals she has worked with to promote women's rights and immigration integration.

The YWCA Women of Distinction Awards draw attention to the contributions women make to the life of the city and in particular their commitment to women and girls.

In 2000, Go founded Creating Access to Regulated Employment (CARE) for internationally educated nurses who needed to upgrade their skills in order to be licensed to practice in Ontario.

In the past nine years, more than 1,000 nurses have been issued licences, Go said.

As executive director of the Yee Hong Centre for Geriatric Care in Markham, Go knows firsthand how vital it is to have nurses on staff.

"We desperately need nurses," she said. "And few nurses choose long-term care as an option."

After calling a meeting with several organizations, provincial funding was approved to launch CARE almost a decade ago.

Several courses are offered to nurses upgrading their skills, including exam preparation

and nursing culture in Ontario, Go said.

Along with her work in health care, Go also headed the Chinese Canadian National Council (CCNC), an organization dedicated to protecting the rights of Chinese Canadians.

She was involved in the movement for redress on behalf of the surviving Chinese Head Tax payers and their families. The Head Tax was a fee charged for each Chinese person entering Canada from 1885 to 1923. Her presidency at CCNC culminated in the organization of the first rally to Ottawa with payers and families affected by the Head Tax. In 2006, Prime Minister Harper offered both an apology and compensation.

Go has also played an integral role in the leadership of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and helped co-ordinate the first women's march against poverty in Ottawa, in which more than 35,000 women rallied on Parliament Hill.

"Chinese people experience a lot of barriers to achieve success," she said. "I didn't know about the Head Tax until I was out of university. It hit me hard. I saw the ugly, dirty, racist history of our country."

Growing up in a traditional Chinese family, Go experienced the difference men and women face.

"You just know there is a difference, even though I went to school and was not denied an education by my family," she said.

The awards honouring the seven recipients will be given at the 29th Annual YWCA Women of Distinction Awards dinner May 13 at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre downtown.