

Polio researcher receives Community Action Award

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Jeanette Shannon thought polio was behind her.

The Applewood Heights resident had the crippling disease at age 11. After years of physiotherapy and hospital care, she was walking and functioning like anyone else by the time she was in her 20s.

Yet, by age 40, she started experiencing "horrific pains." She began to limp, had trouble climbing stairs and sometimes felt too tired to even get out of bed.

In her drive to find out what was happening, Shannon almost single-handedly uncovered a condition known as "Post Polio Syndrome."

A growing number of Ontario doctors are now acknowledging the condition.

Shannon's efforts were recognized recently by the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation when Shannon received a 1999 Community Action Award.

The award recognizes those who have made "major contributions towards improving the lives of persons with disabilities."

Shannon picked up a framed certificate from Ontario Lieutenant-Governor Hilary Weston at a ceremony held at Queen's Park last Wednesday.

"I'm very surprised to receive this because there are lot of people who do a lot of other things," Shannon said.

Polio is an infectious disease of the spinal cord's motor nerves and the brain stem. It's caused by the polio virus and can lead to the deterioration of muscles and skeletal deformity.

Shannon's long line of credits include:

- chairing the Ontario March of Dimes Post Polio Committee
- helping found Ontario's first Post Polio Clinic
- serving as past president of the Ontario March of Dimes
- starting the Post Polio clinic at



Jeanette Shannon of Applewood Heights recently received a 1999 Community Action Award from the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture & Recreation for her work in identifying "Post Polio Syndrome."

Etobicoke's West Park Hospital

- beginning the Ontario March of Dimes Post Polio registry
- founding Ontario's Post Polio Syndrome Conference in 1985.

Shannon said it wasn't until the early 1980s that people showing Post Polio symptoms began to network.

Shannon said her experience with Post Polio Syndrome was demoralizing.

"I went from being able-bodied to using a cane, to wearing a leg brace, to

using an electric chair," said Shannon, a wife and mother.

"I can walk only short distances. About 99 per cent of the time, I'm in the chair."

Shannon said that most have no patients with polio. It's thought to be a childhood disease and when adults complain, doctors suspect arthritis or chronic pain."

Shannon said the Ontario March of Dimes urges kids to get polio vaccines.