

Diana Thomson retires P. Biog. Oct. 22/97

Erinoak boss calls it a day

By ANGELA BLACKBURN
Staff

Diana Thomson believes life is a journey. In retirement, she's simply embarking on a new voyage.

"It's one of those rites of passage, like when you begin Kindergarten or high school," said Thomson, a woman who for 20 years has been executive-director at Mississauga's Erinoak, Serving Young People With Physical Disabilities.

Thomson started her career as a young physiotherapist in Australia. Twists of fate, mostly, and her desire to move up in the world, led her to Erinoak.

At the Erin Mills facility, Thomson has overseen the growth of many Peel and Halton young people who are kids when they arrive and adults when they leave.

"I honestly haven't noticed the time flying by," said Thomson.

The Toronto resident, who still speaks with a distinct Aussie accent, plans to study computers, travel and work part-time.

The red-head is a passionate woman, a career executive with a strong sense of humor and an easy-going manner.

"I'm just learning the difference between an annuals and perennials," said the budding gardener, who might

finally have some free time after maintaining her hectic schedule over two decades.

She has guided Erinoak from its beginning as a dream of some local parents. In the beginning, Erinoak provided a handful of programs to 80 youths. Today, it offers a smorgasbord of services to 1,700 kids.

Thomson remembers moving furniture into Erinoak after moving company employees dumped it on the front lawn.

She remembers doing all the jobs, from helping clients with personal care to keeping the books.

"I learned as I went," she said.

Thomson will leave behind some unfinished business, including an employment office that will be run out of the Erinoak board room by the Coalition For Persons With Disabilities.

After all, what's the point of helping youths at Erinoak unless they can continue their development as adults, Thomson said.

At her Dec. 2 retirement dinner, The Diana Thomson Award will be formally unveiled. It's a new bursary that will help Erinoak clients or alumni with the costs of continuing education.

"I like that. That's why we made the effort in the first place," said Thomson.



Staff photo by Fred Loek

After 20 years as executive director at Erinoak, Serving Young People With Disabilities, Diana Thomson is retiring.