



IMAGE OF THE INFORMER BANNER

Irene Lambert:

Former Montreal West resident receives lifetime advocacy award

By SUE SLADEN

Former Montreal West resident, *Irene Lambert*, has been named recipient of the *2021 Chris Stark Distinguished Advocacy Award*, presented by *Barrier Free Canada*, for her work for Canadians with disabilities. Irene has spent 60-plus years working towards the betterment of the lives of blind people and people with low vision.

Many Montreal West residents will remember seeing Irene and Bob Lambert around the neighbourhood with their golden retriever guide dogs. At one time there were four golden retrievers in their home - the two retired originals, Lambda and Corey , and their two replacements, Zest and Zorba. Bob and Irene lived on Percival Avenue from 1978 to 1990. Both were strong advocates for people with special needs, most specifically those with vision impairments. They accomplished many things during their time in the Town . On their own initiative they had our, then newly conceived *The Informer*, audiotaped on cassette and distributed to visually impaired residents.

Irene and Robert Lambert arrived in Montreal in 1969 in order for Bob to take up a faculty position in the Department of Psychology at Loyola College and then Concordia University. Bob initiated and directed a graduate specialization in the Psychology of Sensory Deficits, the first of its kind. Irene took the job of coordinator and scheduling and was instrumental in advocating for an office for university students with special needs.

When Irene and Bob arrived in Montreal with their three sons, they discovered that guide dogs were not accepted in taxis, at many restaurants or at Place des Arts. That was when they started actively advocating, one result being the passing of the Quebec Act, "An Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights" in 1978. This act has been reviewed and updated in the years since. They even convinced the chairman of Bell Canada that blind people should not be charged for directory assistance.

Very involved

Irene started the Block Parents program in Montreal West which was well supported. She was involved in our first recycling program and was active with the Edinburgh School Home and School Association and the Civic Recreation Association.

In 1981 Councillor Mary Thicke invited Bob to propose a program for the Town to undertake during the Year of the Disabled. **TOUCH** (*Town Office to Upgrade Conditions for the Handicapped*) was established as a result, with the objective of ensuring, among other things, accessibility of store entrances on Westminster and sensitizing town departments of recreation, public works, etc.

When Bob unexpectedly died in 1990, Irene moved to the West Island with her young daughter where she continued to advocate for persons with special needs. There she became president of the *Low Vision Self-Help Association*, which she had helped form and where she is still active.

Irene was president of the *Montreal Association for the Blind Users' Committee* from 1993-2009, president of the *Quebec Federation of the Blind Foundation* and is still a board member there. She is founder and past-president of the Montreal Chapter of the *Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians*. These are only a few of the numerous contributions Irene has made over the years. She has belonged to several West Island committees, and has given many speeches on living with vision loss.

Gradually retiring...

At age 91 Irene is gradually retiring from the world of advocacy. She was both surprised and thrilled to receive the *Chris Stark Advocacy Award* which was established to honour the memory of Chris Stark who also worked tirelessly for the rights of all Canadians with disabilities and who Irene knew and admired.

Irene lives in Dollard des Ormeaux with her partner of ten years. And there are currently no golden retrievers in her life.