

# The Governor General's Caring Canadian Award



## William Martens

Leamington, Ontario

"You can take the boy out of Africa but you can't take Africa out of the boy," says Bill Martens, who has spent much of his volunteer career teaching English as a foreign language in Africa.



After marrying his wife Barbara in 1963, Mr. Martens spent the first three years of their married life teaching in Nigeria in West Africa. Several years later he and his wife and family returned to Africa to teach in Tanzania, East Africa. Since that time, at his own personal expense, Mr. Martens has returned many times to Africa, volunteering four to 5 weeks a year to teach at colleges in both Nigeria and Tanzania. Earlier this year he made his 31<sup>st</sup> trip to Africa.

Impressive as this is, it is only one of Mr. Martens's many volunteer activities, spanning diverse sectors since 1963. His friend and colleague Anna Klassen, a fellow member of the North Leamington United Mennonite Church, recalls that in 1979, Mr. Martens chaired a committee to help refugees from Laos, Cambodia, El Salvador and Vietnam to re-settle in Canada. "These were the first 'Boat People' in the area and he helped with their resettlement," she says. His involvement with refugees continues to this day, as Mr. Martens continues to tutor English as a second language and teach citizenship classes to recent immigrant refugee families.

In 1999, Mr. Martens began working as the Volunteer Coordinator for the Meat Canner - Leamington Committee, a position he held until 2010. The canner committee is a group of volunteers from local churches who can meat for people in need abroad. The mobile meat canner arrives in Leamington for four days every year, at which time 30,000 pounds of meat are canned for distribution abroad. In his position as Volunteer Coordinator, Mr. Martens organized and scheduled over 400 canning and labelling volunteers each year.

A staunch member of the local United Mennonite Church, Mr. Martens now helps out at the Mennonite Central Committee's thrift shop *Furniture and More*, helping to sort and display the donations of furniture and other household items received by the shop. These are then sold with the proceeds going to charity. Mr. Martens is also a member of the local Canadian Food Grains Bank Growing Committee, for which local crops such as soya beans and corn are grown and donated for export to countries in need.

***"He is the personification of his own favourite saying, 'Volunteers are like gold.'"***

**Anna Klassen, nominator**

Mr. Martens lends his voice to local community events through the Essex County Male Choir. At Christmas he can be found playing Santa Claus at a local seniors' home with a small gift in hand for every resident. He also helps the local Good Fellows prepare 300 Christmas food hampers to be delivered to needy families in the community. In the words of Anna Klassen, who nominated Mr. Martens for the Caring Canadian Award, he is the personification of his own favourite saying, "Volunteers are like gold."



The Caring Canadian Award was presented to William Martens on April 17, 2012, at Rideau Hall. Sgt Ronald Duchesne 2012 © Rideau Hall