

Murrayville rekindles childhood memories

Dan Ferguson

Raina Siou recalls visiting a craft fair at Murrayville Hall when she was five years old.

"I was a little girl who grew up here," Siou said.

"I went to Murrayville Elementary school. I had a dream childhood, up until the age of eight."

That was in the early '80s when the economy collapsed, mortgage rates went through the roof, and her parents developed severe mental health problems and lost the family home.

"I ended up one day at a transition house in Richmond with my single mom and my sister, and my mom needing to figure out how to rebuild her life."

Siou is now an RCMP Superintendent, the officer-in-charge of the B.C. operational communications centre and divisional duty officers program, overseeing more than 5,600 employees and a multi-million-dollar budget.

She returned to the Murrayville Hall she remembered on Saturday, March 7, as the keynote speaker at the 14th annual International Women's Day Luncheon, organized by the four Rotary Clubs of Langley.

It was a sold-out event, a packed hall with many prominent people present, with the theme of "give to gain."

Siou credited organizations that gave for making it possible for her mom to rebuild their life.

"I'll tell you, as a 51-year-old female now, a superintendent of the RCMP, with a marriage that's lasted for over 24 years, surrounded by friends and family here today, I just look back at that five-year-old that was standing here in this Murrayville Hall at a craft fair, who had that dream childhood, and then it was yanked from her," Siou shared.

"And I tell you, I'm so grateful I was still able to achieve my full potential, but that was only through people who gave."

There were six nominees for the event's annual unsung heroes award, something Rotarian Annette Borrows explained was a way to put a "positive spin" on the issues women face.

"Instead of going out and protesting on the sidewalks, we thought, why don't we just highlight the great work of women in our communities and be able to showcase them today."

Before she was named the unsung hero, Shruti Chamoli, chair of the Langley Volunteer Bureau, had a one-word description of her reaction to being nominated.

"Wow," she told the Langley Advance Times. Then, she elaborated. "I'm humbled. Honestly, very humbled. I really don't have much to say, but very, very humbled."

Under her stewardship, the bureau has grown to more than 4,200 volunteers supporting more than 75 non-profits.

"Shruti leverages 20 years of HR expertise to champion pay equity and anti-racism," her nominee profile observed.

Funds raised by the luncheon will go to Union Gospel Mission's Cedar Haven Women's Recovery Centre, an addiction recovery centre in Langley, as well as the Fairy Godmother Foundation, which assists young graduates with grad outfits and other costs.



"Unsung hero" Shruti Chamoli was recognized for her stewardship of the Langley Volunteer Bureau at 14th annual International Women's Day Luncheon, organized by the Rotary Clubs of Langley. (Dan Ferguson/Langley Advance Times)

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Unsung hero nominees (left to right) Shruti Chamoli, Dr. Kathleen Stephany, Kim Snow, Lara Petrie, Diane Summers and Margaret Ann at the 14th annual International Women's Day Luncheon, organized by the Rotary Clubs of Langley. (Shaulene Wash/Langley Advance Times)



The 14th annual International Women's Day Luncheon, organized by the Rotary Clubs of Langley, was sold out. (Dan Ferguson/Langley Advance Times)



The 14th annual International Women's Day Luncheon was organized by the Rotary Clubs of Langley. (Dan Ferguson/Langley Advance Times)



Lily Taylor (left) and Estelle Chin from Langley Community Music School performed at the 14th annual International Women's Day Luncheon, organized by the Rotary Clubs of Langley. (Dan Ferguson/Langley Advance Times)