



Cabbagetown Preservation Association Recognition Award

The 2021 Cabbagetown Preservation Association Recognition Award is awarded to
Helen Coltrinari.

Helen, a native of Caledonia Ontario, arrived in Cabbagetown with her husband Livio in 1970 when they bought their home on Winchester Street. Helen a teacher, and Livio a business executive, were young professionals who despite family protests regarding the “up and coming” neighbourhood they had chosen to settle into, had early on identified the magic of Cabbagetown, even if one of their neighbours kept a bathtub on the front lawn.

Helen’s career evolved over the years from a teacher with the then North York School Board to a stint teaching for the Department of National Defence in Germany. She had a very successful engagement at TVO, first, heading up the French second language programs, then developing and leading new and innovative on-line teaching programs including a virtual classroom initiative, a precursor for today’s needs. Later, Helen was an Instructor at Brock University and a program development consultant. In her spare time, Helen has authored over 40 French language classroom ready resources for teachers as well as textbook units for Pearson and Nelson Publishing as well as CEC from Montreal.

Helen, who comes from a large family with seven siblings, learned early on from her mother the value of volunteerism. She has served on the board and as President of the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers, served on the board and as President of French for the Future, an organization founded by John Ralston Saul and Lisa Balfour Bowen, served on the board of the Anne Johnston Health Station and for six years served on the board of the Orpheus Choir, where she is still a patron. Helen like others who freely volunteer their time has a weakness of not being able to say “no”, when asked to engage.

All of her out-of-community professional and volunteer engagements did not limit Helen from not saying no when asked by the late Peggy Kurtin to join the board of the Cabbagetown Preservation Association 20+ years ago. From the moment she joined the CPA board, Helen has been an untiring doer. Helen stepped up years ago, when the founders of the Cabbagetown Tour of Homes decided to step back, and the organizing committee needed new direction. Helen was right there to help and over the ensuing 15+ years she has served as Chair, Co-Chair or a committee member to this ongoing bi-annual project which is now part of the CPA’s activities. Helen’s love of gardens led her to take on the leadership of the CPA Streetscapes in Bloom award program in 1997 and promote and enhance the award which recognizes the best gardens in the neighbourhood each year. But that was not enough community engagement for Helen. In 2007, Helen designed and launched the first Hidden Gardens & Private Spaces tour, which has turned out to be a success and a major funding source to the CPA. In the spring of 2020 when the Garden Tour was cancelled due to COVID-19, Helen envisioned the Plant Sharing Day which was well received.

Helen served as Chair of the board of the CPA (2008-2010) and has been a major contributor to numerous committees, and a strong supporter of the board renewal process. Helen has also been a leader in finding ways to attract new and younger members to the CPA and its committees. She is always one of the first to volunteer for any task, large or small, fun, or not so much – from editing and proofreading, to cleaning the storage locker, delivering newsletters or being an extra pair of hands to put up the event tent.

Helen founded the Caroling for Cans initiative that occurs each December, 30 years ago. Over the years, this festive gathering of caroling neighbours has collected thousands of pounds of donated food and thousands of dollars of cash in support of local food banks.

On behalf of the Cabbagetown Preservation Association, we acknowledge and thank Helen for her many lasting contributions to the Cabbagetown community.