



CALGARY HERALD

Calgarian nominated for national citizen award

REID SOUTHWICK, THE CALGARY HERALD

Published on: November 25, 2014

At an East Village studio, Wendy Lees teaches seniors living well below the poverty line and other marginalized residents how to find their creative voice with writing and visual art classes.

On a shoestring budget, she opened the studio earlier this year. Now, she's receiving national recognition.

"My goal with create! in the East Village is to improve the well-being of the people through creative expression," Lees said.

For her work in the East Village, Lees was nominated for Everyday Political Citizen of the year, a national award that recognizes Canadians who take exceptional steps to improve their communities.

Sixteen judges from across the country, including CBC personality Rick Mercer and NHL defenceman Grant Clitsome, select a shortlist from nearly 350 nominations, and vote for the winner.

Nancy Close, a juror who works in Mayor Naheed Nenshi's office, shortlisted Lees for the nod after becoming impressed with the way create! brings East Village residents together while giving them a creative voice.

"What grabbed my heart was that connection in neighs rather than being part of a political party," Close said. "I don't know her, but I know she was surprised to be even nominated."

As a former volunteer at the Mustard Seed, a shelter and outreach centre for Calgarians living in poverty, Lees had learned the non-profit was getting rid of creative programs for its marginalized clients.

<http://calgaryherald.com/news/local-news/calgarian-nominated-for-national-citizen-award>



Lees started the studio almost a year ago in donated space at the Golden Age Club, a seniors group, and bought supplies with money from her own pockets, along with donations from friends and a small community grant.

Many of the budding artists who flock to her studio for creative workshops, which run four times a week, hail from marginalized backgrounds, arriving there from shelters and subsidized seniors housing.

Aside from getting their creative juices flowing, Lees also wants to help the existing neighbourhood integrate with a big redevelopment underway at East Village that's expected to draw thousands more residents in the coming years.

“I want to make sure that the people that are currently here are cared for and integrated and understood by the new people moving in and the developers.”

The winning Everyday Political Citizen of the year will be named Dec. 3.