

**Below is the Nomination Statement for the
Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal
prepared by my wife, Marion Raycheba**



Frank J. O'Hara began volunteering in his early 30s. An energetic young man and the father of five children, naturally his first volunteer contributions centred on helping in and around his immediate community. It wasn't long, however,

before he branched out. Eventually, he became very active as a volunteer mentor and advisor internationally.

Wherever he has given his time and efforts, Frank is known as a generous, likeable, helpful, effective, enthusiastic person who focuses on helping the group reach its goals and other volunteers feel welcome, useful, and appreciated.

This statement summarizes key points about Frank O'Hara's volunteer contributions from roughly age 30 to the present. (He will celebrate his 86th birthday on April 4th, 2012.) Throughout these 50+ years, he has conducted himself with dignity, grace, humility, and a deep commitment to the common threads connecting people, no matter where they were born or in what circumstances.

This is his story....

Frank J. O'Hara: Ordinary Canadian, Extraordinary Volunteer

First Steps

Frank taught Sunday School at the **First Unitarian Congregation** in Toronto for approximately five years. He believed in emphasizing knowledge of and appreciation for all faiths. He developed a highly successful program for his teenage students, who were totally engaged by his program of studying other faiths and visiting churches where these faiths were practised. (Coincidentally, about five years' ago or so, Frank ran into one of his former Sunday School students at Lord Dufferin Public School on Parliament Street in downtown Toronto. Now a teacher herself, she greeted Frank with delight and said, "You were the best teacher I ever had. You're the reason I became a teacher!")

At the same time, Frank served on the Board of Directors of First Unitarian Congregation. To this day, some 50 years' later, he still meets friends he made at that time for lunch once a month to discuss current affairs and social issues.

During this period, he also volunteered for several years as a **Hockey Coach** for children in the elementary grades. This wasn't a surprising choice—three of Frank's children were boys and all were as energetic and lively as he was as a youngster. (He was born and raised in a mining community near Kirkland Lake where about the only winter sport was hockey. He has fond memories of playing with several boys who eventually made it to the National Hockey League.)

Middle Stage

As Frank's personal circumstances changed, he branched out, too. One of his first big commitments was joining the **Toronto Taoist Tai Chi Society**. After training for two years, he spent another two years as a volunteer leader teaching Tai Chi. To this day, he enjoys the practice of Tai Chi. In fact, he attends a class every week-day morning at The Settlement House in Grange Park in downtown Toronto.

As well, he became very active in a chapter of Toastmasters. In fact, he was one of the founders of the **Podium Club** chapter.

During this same period, Frank became interested in Humanism. Eventually, he joined **The Humanist Association of Toronto**. He was a very active member for about 15 years and served on the Board of Directors for about three years. He also designed and looked after the Association's first web site. Now an Honorary Life Member, Frank attends some meetings, gives marketing advice, and sometimes appears as a guest speaker to make presentations on issues such as the stigma associated with mental illness.

Frank's contributions extended to his own definition of his responsibilities as a citizen. He participated in many **political campaigns** as a volunteer door-to-door canvasser and a poll scrutineer for several candidates. On several occasions, he also worked for Elections Canada in a supervisory capacity.

For many years, when he lived in **Don Valley West**, he supported John Godfrey, who was the M.P. at that time. Frank developed and maintained Mr. Godfrey's first web site. Many years before that, he canvassed door-to-door for Peter Stollery. More recently, he canvassed in Trinity-Spadina for you and, incidentally, introduced you to William Fengjie Du.

In the early 1990s, Frank also served as a member of the **East York Development Committee**. The Committee's mandate was to encourage industrial development in the area.

And Today

Experience as an entrepreneur taught Frank the value of well-timed mentoring. When he decided to retire, it was natural to look for opportunities to share *his* experience, knowledge, and expertise. That was when he signed on with **CESO (Canadian Executive Service Organization)**. CESO is a not-for-profit organization that sends Volunteer Advisors (VAs) to serve as mentors, advisers, and trainers to clients and partners at home (to Aboriginal communities in Canada) and abroad. Frank found himself much in demand, thanks to his business savvy, his expertise in e-commerce, his focus on sales and marketing, and his intuitive understanding and mastery of small- and medium-size business challenges and management.

From 1999 to 2005, he did 11 international assignments (in Armenia, Bolivia, China, Guyana, Romania, Russia, Sri Lanka, St. Lucia, and Ukraine) and two national assignments with First Nations' groups under the auspices of CESO. He also did a further two international assignments in China at the direct invitation of the Government of the People's Republic of China—so impressed was everyone with the quality he brought to his role as advisor and mentor the first time around. He would still be doing it if CESO rules permitted volunteers to continue after reaching the age of 80.

Frank continues to mentor here in Toronto, however. He does it formally through organizations such as the **Centre Francophone de Toronto**. The Centre provides counselling and other support to French-speaking immigrants. Frank's entrepreneurial approach, business experience, and ability to communicate effectively in both English and French have made him a particularly valuable volunteer. He has mentored many individuals (ranging in age from early 20s to 50-something). He gives very practical, hands-on help in reshaping résumés, developing job search criteria and techniques, and providing moral support during those difficult early days in a new country.

Frank also acts as an **informal mentor** with individuals he meets from day to day. This is something he has done many times. For example, at this moment is he helping an immigrant from Bangladesh and another from China with their résumés and giving them advice on job-hunting in their new country. He is also mentoring a young Russian woman, an interpreter he met while doing a CESO assignment, who has qualified as a Landed Immigrant and will be moving to Canada shortly.

Although now almost 86 (he was born on Easter Sunday, April 4th, 1926), Frank still finds himself, somewhat to his surprise, in demand as a web site developer and marketing advisor.

An example is **Pierspective Entraide Humanitaire**. Over a period of approximately a year, Frank developed a template for a bilingual website (www.haitiaide.ca), helped the Board develop a marketing plan, participated actively in fund-raisers, and generally lent a hand when his special skills and knowledge were of benefit. He helped mentor and train new volunteers to take over the website and other jobs. He is no longer actively involved with Pierspective, but he still, several years' later, responds to calls with questions and requests for advice.

Another example is **The Secret Handshake Schizophrenia Peer Support**. The Secret Handshake is a micro organization that provides peer support for people with this devastating mental illness. Over the period of a year, Frank provided moral support, direction, and counsel on forming a Board of Directors, helped develop and present funding proposals, and acted as a sounding-board and reality check. He feels particularly close to The Secret Handshake's concerns because two of Frank's sons developed schizophrenia in their teens, a family tragedy that left emotional scars Frank still feels today.

Frank also developed the first web site for **The Family Council**, a not-for-profit associated with CAMH that provides support for families dealing with issues of mental illness and addiction. Frank joined the Board of Directors and served as Vice-President and then President during a difficult period of transition for the organization. It was facing challenges in recruiting appropriate candidates for the Board, implementing strategic, marketing, and membership plans, managing staff, and developing mutually beneficial relationships with community partners.

For the past three years or so, Frank has undertaken assignments for **Management Advisory Service (MAS)**, a CESO-like group based in Toronto that matches skills and experience to the needs of not-for-profits in Ontario. He has done assignments with a variety of groups, including Tamil youth developing a self-help and support organization, a group advocating for composting and recycling in apartment towers in the city, and a cultural group offering modestly-priced classical music concerts for the general public and in seniors' residences in Toronto.

Frank is a popular guest speaker who enjoys being entertaining as well as informative. As a veteran of World War II, he is on the books of **The Dominion Institute's Memory Project** and responds to requests to speak to students ranging in age from the under-10s to teenagers near high school graduation. Every year, around Remembrance Day, he does what he can. His favourite engagements have been with the Grades 2 and 3 classes at Island Public/Natural Science School on Centre Island.

Recently, Frank spent several years working on the **Toronto Police Service (TPS) 52 Division Plaza** project. He often refers to it as The Jane Jacobs Plaza project. This stretch of street will be very familiar to anyone who lives in Trinity-Spadina as does Frank. The stretch from University Avenue to the AGO is punctuated by the barren, windswept, concrete wasteland fronting the TPS 52 Division station. Frank is convinced it can be made a thing of beauty and pleasure for everyone who passes by. He made it his business to research, find other interested parties, jog memories, dig up records, create linkages, and generally keep the idea of wonderful possibilities on the radar screen of the decision-makers who will, ultimately, be the ones to make the thing happen. To his great pleasure, beautifying Dundas from University to Bathurst is now on the City of Toronto's official list of sites to be improved and work has actually begun at the Bathurst Street end. Frank is looking forward to celebrating with his neighbours when the work crew has reached 52 Division and done the job of adding to the beauty of Toronto.

For the Joy of It

Frank believes in bringing joy to as many people as he can. As well as a steady stream of plays on words, he also loves to sing, something that comes naturally to him thanks to his fine voice and good ear. Belting out show tunes and crooning romantic songs are his particular favourites.

Several years ago, Frank formed a trio, **The Forget-Me-Nots**, with two long-time friends, Al Boyer and Don Cameron. Don played the piano, Al played the bass, and Frank sang old-time favourites dating from the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. They booked gigs at seniors' residences, such as the Loyola Arrupe Centre for Seniors on Bloor Street West and Christie Gardens.

Frank was having so much fun that, when he was presented with an opportunity to form another group, he didn't hesitate. **The MetroTones**, variously a trio to a quintet, has developed an eclectic program that includes folk songs, soft rock hits from the 1960s and 1970s, Christmas carols in English, French, and Latvian, and, yes, some of Frank's old-time favourites, too. The MetroTones also perform at seniors' residences, such as the Beaches Arms on Kingston Road and Kristus Darzs Latvian Home in York Region. (The MetroTones' pianist is an ordained Minister in the Latvian Lutheran Church.)

In Conclusion

Recently (on December 14th, 2011), Frank was honoured to receive an Ontario Senior Achievement Award in the category of Voluntarism. This Award recognizes his contributions to his community since the age of 65.

I believe it would be entirely fitting to recognize Frank's volunteer contributions over the *whole* of his adult life with Her Majesty's Diamond Jubilee Medal. He indeed personifies the willing, helpful, kind, generous Canadian.

Respectfully Submitted by

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