

Serre nominated for June Callwood Award for volunteerism

by Nathan Howes
Special to the Beaver

Giving back to the community is a part of John Serre's core — whether it's through writing a song or fundraising for a local charity.

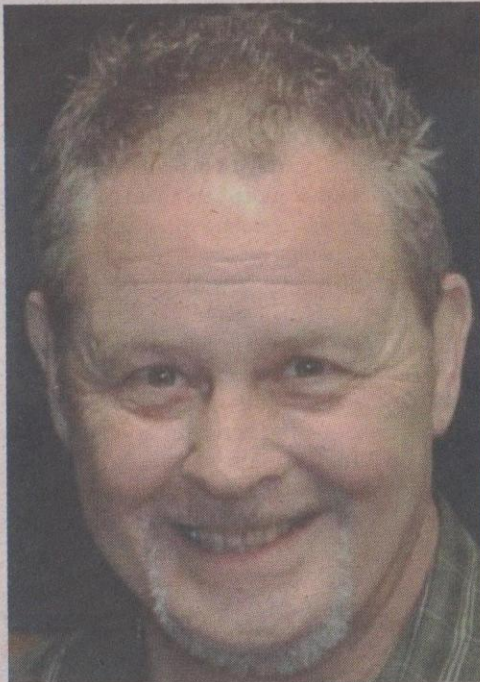
The Oakville resident and singer/songwriter, who also is a director of Humm Music Canada alongside his wife, Claudette Serre, has been volunteering for 25 years and was recently nominated for the June Callwood Outstanding Achievement Award for his efforts.

The award recognizes individuals and groups in Ontario that have made a meaningful contribution to their communities or provide significant support to volunteer activities.

Up to 20 people receive the accolade annually at a recognition ceremony held during National Volunteer Week in April.

"Songwriters are really philanthropists at heart because they try to write and create, and explain life or your feelings. They try to write for you, not just themselves. They're a giving type in the first place," said Serre.

The 57-year-old has contributed his time and music to, and raised funds for, dozens of organizations over the years — the Songwriter's Association of Canada (SAC), Metronome Canada, Burlington Sound Of



John Serre

| photo by Jayson Mills - special to the Beaver

Music Festival (BSOMF), Canadian Cancer Society (CCS), Kerr Street Ministries (KSM), SAVIS of Halton, World Vision Canada,

Food for Life and Fare Share food bank, among others.

While Serre has held numerous positions in the music industry, perhaps his most notable role was the host and community producer of TVCogeco's *In A Song* for four years.

The half-hour TV program showcased local and independent musicians, songwriters and bands from 2008-12.

"Out of all that I've done, that job involved the most people that gave of their time, of themselves, of their music. We raised money, we received toys for others," said Serre, noting the show highlighted 60 singer/songwriters and 10 bands.

"We ended up winning the best show in the province Star Award. I'm not done with this yet."

He credits his wife Claudette for the nomination because "she's not just my wonderful wife and partner, she's in there knee-deep all the time," Serre said.

The Oakville musician also praised his coworkers and the artists he's met and featured.

"Whether it's the TV show, the fundraisers or decorating... it's not my nomination alone. I'm just the spearhead," said Serre. "I figured out a long time ago that when you do stuff like this, it makes you feel good. I like feeling good."

Serre started volunteering in 1990, creating a tabloid program for two consecutive Live Music Lovers' Charity concerts in Kingston, Ont.

At the time, he was a student at St. Lawrence College working for the college newspaper.

"I was keen on what the college newspaper was doing and it got involved with the Live Music Lovers' concert, put on by Matthew Woodward. He set up eight bars in Kingston as hubs with giant cardboard, round bins to put food in," said John.

"The newspaper made a 20-page tabloid paper that had a centre-section pullout for the artists and their bios, pictures and booking information."

The following year, Serre became the editor-in-chief of the newspaper and joined the Ontario Community Newspaper Association (OCNA).

"I had worked in newspapers at the *Bloor West Villager* prior, but I had printer's ink underneath my fingernails. I always liked the power of the press," he said.

Janet Levai, a friend of Serre, worked with him at a Halloween charity event in October 2013 that raised \$5,400 for KSM.

In a nomination letter, Levai said Serre is "forever paying forward" to Oakville, Halton and Ontario by volunteering his time, musical talent and kindness.

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"We are not sure where John finds the time to do all the events and work. It is not just one reason why John deserves this recognition, there are 25 years of reasons," said Levai.

In addition to the June Callwood award nomination, Serre has garnered a Volunteer Halton Cheers to Volunteers Award, Hamilton Music Award and a TVCogeco Volunteer of

the Month nod.

He was also nominated for a Community Spirit Award and was a Cogeco Stars Among Us award finalist for three consecutive years.

"I couldn't function if I couldn't be doing something for those less fortunate. The more you feed off this positive feeling of giving, the more you want to do it. I'll be doing another 25 years of volunteering if I can."