

# Don Stuart is Barrie's remarkable treasure



By Donna Douglas  
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Don Stuart is this year's recipient of the Camphill Communities Community Action Award. Andre Beneteau Photo

Next Thursday night, feet will hit the floor and people will applaud the contribution of Don Stuart to our community and the world at large.

Don is this year's recipient of the Camphill Communities Community Action Award.

He is modest about this. In fact, he's downright embarrassed that he's been chosen for this community-wide honour. But, Don, really!

Recipient of literally dozens of awards and designer of dozens more, Don bears the insignia of the Order of Canada, the Order of Ontario, Queen's Jubilee Medal, Royal Canadian Academy of Arts, Ontario Arts Council, and on and on.

You'd think a man weighted down with so many medals would have a heavier head! But Don remains modest, thus embarrassed by this latest award. Born in Port Credit, he studied textile, wood and metal art at the Ontario College of Art. It was while teaching weaving to Inuit women in Pangnirtung, Baffin Island, that Don met his wife, Jill Mason and together they have forged a 43-year partnership that includes a son Brian, a daughter Meeka and subsequent little people.

Without Jill, well, it just wouldn't work. Don's body of work moved from textiles to metal sometime in the 1980s. While he arrived at Georgian College to teach textiles in 1972, it was his interest and ability with metal that drove him to design the college's well-respected jewelry and metals program in the School of Design Arts.

Don Stuart is a master craftsman, a jewelry designer, a metal worker without boundary. Perhaps his greatest body of work is Homage, a 39-piece pinnacle which honours Canadian women and their achievements, all in personalized necklaces.

For instance, his latest piece is for Elsie Picone of Dundas, Ontario. Don's Homage show has been drawing hundreds of attendees for the past month at the Carnegie Gallery in Dundas.

Elsie Picone is a famous producer of apple pies. She has created pies for prime ministers, members of Parliament, and famous dignitaries who have visited the Dundas/Hamilton area. Don's necklace, hanging in the gallery, draws its power from Elsie herself.

He created moulds of tiny apple branches, filled the molds with sterling silver, added apples of green and red, and connected them to each other with a clasp of gold that features a minute pie lifter. Astronaut Julie Payette's necklace features planets rotating around each other. Laura Secord's looks like a string of delectable chocolates. And on and on ... While he considers Homage his most important work to date, he also remembers fondly clients who have become friends. He has designed literally hundreds of pieces for individuals - wedding and engagement rings, necklaces, a well loved pocket watch, brooches and clasps.

He's had a number of one-man shows at galleries in Canada and abroad. He's had lots of commissions, too, and Barrie is home to many of them. The cross in the narthex at St. Andrew's Church is in honour of Arch and Helen Brown's 50th wedding anniversary. He's completed liturgical work for Trinity Anglican Church and the IOOF Chapel. Craft councils in Saskatchewan and Nova Scotia have revered Don's work. The DeBeers Diamond people have honoured Don repeatedly for his jewelry design work. And nominations flow around him. But here's the important thing about Don Stuart.

As many nominations as he has received, he has given many more. He is quick to identify effort in this community and nominates many, many people for important awards. Don was called on to design the June Callwood award, given annually to community activists.

He designed the Barrie Business Awards which were received proudly for a decade. Had he taught for one more year at Georgian and achieved the 30-year mark, he would have received the pin he designed for long service! He designed the award for the Canadian Quilter Guild (a clever thimble), the award for Sinton Bus Lines, the maple leaf pin for Anne Murray's commemorative tour, the Ontario Professional Planners award, the Rogers Communication Award.

Next year will be Don's 50th year of pulling remarkable art from his brain and his fingers. He will celebrate it with a five-decade retrospective at the Simcoe County Museum, pulling it in to Canada's Sesquicentennial. Of course. Don is our treasure, for sure. He thinks about his Homage show to Canadian women and says "we don't celebrate our own enough." So true.

We're going to take care of that next Thursday, April 7 at the MacLaren Art Centre with Camphill. Want a ticket?

Stop in to the Camphill Store at 123 Dunlop St. E. All tickets are designed to celebrate creativity, and Don Stuart. Thanks, Don.

*Donna Douglas is a Barrie writer. You can read 21 years of her columns on her website at [www.donnadouglas.com](http://www.donnadouglas.com). You can reach her at [donna@donnadouglas.com](mailto:donna@donnadouglas.com).*