

# THE BUFFALO NEWS

## Falls couple win laurels as 'Neighbors of the Year'

By Denise Jewell Gee - NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU  
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NIAGARA FALLS — Tom and Louise Yots long ago made a commitment to their city.

After raising their sons in Niagara Falls, they opened the Park Place Bed and Breakfast and became cheerleaders for the city's struggling tourism industry.

To stop the loss of significant landmarks, Tom Yots helped launch the city's Historic Preservation Commission and became its chairman. To help direct confused tourists to downtown attractions, his wife helped start a volunteer greeters program.

So when the 2003 death of community activist Carolyn Van Schaik left unfulfilled a dream of converting a former student nurses' residence into housing for abused and homeless women, the Yotses became part of a group that made it happen.

Each act has demonstrated the couple's shared philosophy toward community.

"We feel if you're going to commit to being in a city, you have to expect to be a part of the city," Louise Yots said. "You can't wait for it to come to you."

Last month, the Supportive Housing Network of New York honored the couple in New York City as "Neighbors of the Year" for their volunteer work at Carolyn's House, the long-term transitional home for women on Sixth Street run by the YWCA of Niagara.

Kathleen Granchelli, the YWCA chief executive, had nominated the Yotses because of their far-reaching work for Carolyn's House, named for Van Schaik.

Tom Yots wrote an application to get the building listed on the National Register of Historic Places, citing its significance as a home constructed by the Sisters of St. Francis in 1928 for nurses in training.

The designation brought the project \$979,000 through historic preservation tax credits — a key piece of funding for the building's \$6 million renovation.

Since then, the Yotses have served on an advisory committee for Carolyn's House and as chairmen of fundraisers for the facility. They also have given tours of the building.

"They're just so many things to us," Granchelli said.

Their passion for Carolyn's House pours out when the Yotses talk about the program, which offers on-site job training to the women living in the building's 19 apartments.

"We live in a community where it's almost a given that people are hungry here, but it's a whole different concept at Carolyn's House," Louise Yots said.

"This wasn't a handout," Tom Yots added. "This was lending someone a hand."

They say the program's focus on teaching women to become self-sufficient has helped attract a core group of supporters like themselves.



The Yotses are adamant that they are just part of a movement committed to the future of Niagara Falls — whether helping its underserved population, preserving its heritage or sustaining its culture.

“We moved here because we chose to, and I think that all kinds of people are like that,” Tom Yots said. “It’s a challenge to you to make the place a better place.”

[djewell@buffnews.com](mailto:djewell@buffnews.com)