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FACT SHEET: Violet Richardson Award

Organizational Profile

Founded in 1921, Soroptimist International of the Americas is an international volunteer service organization for business and professional women. Almost 100,000 Soroptimists in more than 120 countries and territories contribute time and financial support to community-based projects benefiting women and girls.

Organizational Mission

Soroptimist's mission is to improve the lives of women and girls, in local communities and around the world.

Targeting Girls

Soroptimist is concerned with the special challenges facing girls and young women today. The organization launched the Violet Richardson Award program in 2000 as a way to recognize girls for their volunteer service to their communities. The program honors young women between the ages of 14 and 17 whose volunteer efforts include: helping other disadvantaged girls; fighting drugs, crime and violence; cleaning up the environment; and working to end discrimination and poverty. Participating Soroptimist clubs implement the program at the local level, where awards vary. Club-level recipients then become eligible for a \$1,000 cash award, with a matching \$1,000 cash award for the charitable organization of the recipient's choosing. The Soroptimist organization grants one finalist \$2,500 award to the recipient's volunteer organization.

The program is named after Violet Richardson Ward, the first president of the first Soroptimist club in 1921. Richardson Ward was committed to creating opportunities for girls and young women through her affiliations with Soroptimist, the Girl Scout Council and the American Association of University Women. Her passion for community service, particularly as it affected women and girls, has been an inspiration to Soroptimists throughout the years.

Recent Recipients

Recent finalists include young women from Canada, Japan and Brazil. Each received the award for her considerable, and unique, volunteer contributions.

Vanessa Mansell

Vanessa Mansell of Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada, received the 2004 finalist Violet Richardson Award for establishing *Arms of Compassion*, which makes and donates quilts to people who are experiencing tragedy and loneliness. The group has made more than 200 quilts for children in hospitals, women undergoing chemotherapy and people without homes. Mansell sent half of the quilts to comfort poor families in Nicaragua. "Throughout our lives, hardships and heartbreaks come,

leaving us feeling alone,” she said. “Sometimes it just helps heal a part of us, to snuggle down in a blanket, wrapping it tightly around our shoulders, giving us that feeling of security.”

Grasiely Matias Ramos

Grasiely Matias Ramos, of Curitiba, Paraná, Brazil, was Soroptimist’s 2003 finalist. She received the award for her work with the Paula Pedroso do Amaral Girls Republic, a shelter for young women who are victims of domestic violence. Grasiely organized a buddy program for the young women, providing the girls with companionship, social and academic mentoring, and peer-to-peer support. Grasiely wants to “prove to young people that volunteering is the best way we can help others and achieve a more fair and happy world.”

Emi Kono

Emi Kono of Kagoshima, Japan, received a finalist Violet Richardson Award in 2002 for her involvement with the Radio Science Club. Each year, members of the club travel to a remote village off the coast of the Kagoshima Prefecture where they provide free electronics and appliance repair to the impoverished people who live there. There is no electrical store on the island, and residents depend on members of the Radio Science Club to repair much-needed household appliances. Said Emi, “When we give the repaired products back to their owners we are always given a warm welcome and encouraged by their heartfelt gratitude.”

Aimée Ouellette

In 2001, Aimée, of The Langleys, British Columbia, Canada, received the first finalist Violet Richardson Award for her work with the Langley Grade Seven Girls Conference, a one-day series of workshops and speakers that addresses self-esteem and personal development of adolescent girls. The conference provides a comprehensive series of workshops on health and sexuality, healthy relationships, career development and personal growth. Aimée started the conference because, “going into high school, some girls forget who they are, and their spark gets buried under the pressures of homework and relationships. I want to make sure it’s a little easier for them.”