

# 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the YMCA Peace Medal

## YMCA of Greater Montreal 2007 Peace Medal Recipients



**Vuvu Gospel Songs** is a gospel group formed in Angola in 1989. Its name means “hope” in the Kikongo language. An accomplished gospel group, they have performed in Africa, Europe and North America. In 2002, while in Newfoundland participating in Festival 500, they made the decision to apply for refugee status in Canada. The repressive political situation in Angola had made life dangerous and difficult for them to perform their music.

Now settled in Montreal, they continue to sing songs about social justice, poverty, street children, peace and liberty, raising awareness of the social realities and injustice experienced by many in Africa and around the world.



**Martin Neufeld**, a trained mediator and experienced instructor of meditation techniques, simply gives hugs. In Montreal’s public squares, on the street, and on campuses, he offers comfort and unconditional acceptance to anyone willing to accept his hug.

After the shooting at Dawson College, Martin offered consoling hugs to students, staff and parents; many who later wrote to his website thanking him for this simple act of caring and giving at a time it was so badly needed. He is a creative ambassador of peace.



**Claude Desjardins** is a sculptor with a mission. She wants to cover the world with “Soldiers of Peace”. Under her guidance, 9 “ figures have been created by school children, corporate employees, and the public and have been displayed by the hundreds across Canada, Brazil and France.

Claude points out that combining the concept of peace with soldiers represents the union of the male and female principal, which creates life. Making a soldier leads to the contemplation of union and peace, invoking reflection and action. Each soldier has a necklace with a sunflower seed, symbolizing a return to the light. This project encourages people the world over to take the time to reflect and envision peace.



staff and students, a Peace Assembly program, an Annual Peace Summit, anti-racism events and a World Harmony Run.

**The Lester B. Pearson School Board** is the only school board in Canada that has made the commitment to have all its schools become qualified as Peaceful Schools. Presently more than 30 of its 65 schools have implemented the Peaceful Schools International program and have earned the right to fly the Peaceful Schools International flag.

Some of the activities adopted by Peaceful Schools are peer mediation programs involving



recess and at lunchtime. Some of the experienced mediators are “on call” all day, available to offer a mediation session whenever the need arises.

**Christmas Park School Peer Mediation Group** is run by the students of this Beaconsfield elementary school. The mediation program, based on a curriculum developed by Peaceful Schools International, of which Christmas Park School is a member, has been successful in reducing conflicts and in teaching students peace- building skills.

Currently, 16 mediators at the school are responsible for monitoring the schoolyard at



**Malik Shaheed** was a DJ for Musique-Plus. He wanted youth in Quebec to understand that Hip Hop music is not just for Black youth, but is a movement that crosses regional, cultural and racial barriers. Malik organized Hip Hop events across Quebec for youth. He taught them about language structure and how music can be a window to the world. Malik was able to unite black and white youth, English and French in the Hip Hop scene in Montreal and other regions of Quebec.

He is also a volunteer at the YMCA Youth Zone, and at the Coopérative Jeunesse de la Petite Bourgogne, and he visits schools in disadvantaged areas to speak against violence. He is the spokesperson for the “Return to School” program of the Montreal Chamber of Commerce. Malik is a positive role model for all youth; demonstrating perseverance, integrity and peace.