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| **Celebrating**  **Languages of Life**  By Caroline Brown  Few people know that the Glebe  is harbouring one of the most industrious  women in Ottawa. No, she is  neither a diplomat nor Member of  Parliament. She is the founder of  the invaluable translation and interpretation  agency Languages of Life  Incorporated, and her name is Bryna  Monson. In 1979 Monson started  the agency from her very own living  room whilst immobilized with a  broken leg. Starting fresh, she built  up a stockpile of translators and interpreters  to assist people who could  not speak either of Canada’s two official  languages whether it was in  hospitals, with social services or in  legal matters.  Monson explains why she started  the agency. “I wanted to help  people who needed help. When I  was a social worker working with  cancer patients in Ottawa Civic  Hospital, I would see patients and  doctors unable to communicate because  of a language barrier. It was  very difficult for me to see that.”  Monson often says it was a blessing  that she broke her leg and was  able to initiate the translation service.  Today the agency has moved  out of her living room and into Fifth  Avenue Court. Languages of Life is  a non-profit charitable organization  now with over 400 translators and  interpreters for over 100 languages.  Yet despite the notable expansion  of the enterprise, the caring nature  at the heart of this essential service  has always remained true. No  matter what the case, Languages  of Life provides a 24/7 service.  Whether it is a midnight request for  an interpreter in the cell block or an  obscure and rare dialect needed in a    *Bryna Monson stands near her Fifth*  *Avenue Court office.* | hospital, the call is always met with  a prompt response. This can be a  fast paced job, but Monson takes it  all in her stride.  It is quality just as much as speed  that matters when sending out a  translator or interpreter. Languages  of Life deals with prominent organizations  such as the Ottawa Police  Service, the RCMP, law firms, insurance  companies and health services,  all of whom require an unbiased,  confidential service. A sure indication  of the quality of service Languages  of Life provides is evident  in a letter written by Debra Frazer,  director general of the Ottawa Police  Service. “The Ottawa Police Service  is proud of its longstanding, successful  partnership with Languages  of Life,” she wrote to Monson. “Regardless  of the time of day – or night  – Bryna’s agency quickly responds  to their needs. She has earned our  confidence and trust with the high  calibre of her work and the integrity  that underlies it.”  With impressive accolades like this  it is no wonder Monson’s office walls  are lined with awards and letters of  support from the likes of the Governor  General. In 1994 she received the  ATIO Award (Association of Translators  and Interpreters of Ontario) for  her contribution to the development  of the language profession. She was  the first non-translator candidate to  receive the award. She won the 1995  Whitton Award for her contribution  to community activism and Mayor  Larry O’Brien declared Canadian  Multiculturalism Day 2007 a celebration  of the achievements of Languages  of Life.  Unsurprisingly, Bryna Monson’s  reputation now precedes her. She  is a hard working, say-it-straight or  don’t-say-it-at-all kind of lady. Her  direct approach can often seem intimidating  but those who know her  well know this is just surface deep  and inside she has a heart of gold.  This is made clear by the amount of  time and energy she has so lovingly  invested in the agency. In addition to  serving the entire Ottawa-Carleton  region, Monson conscientiously  supports her local Glebe neighbourhood.  Languages of Life has been in  the Glebe for 22 years and Monson  loves the location. She has a close  relationship with many of the local  businesses and makes sure they all  get a dose of her wicked sense of  humour.  What has made this small nonprofit  charitable organization such  a success? The agency is now in its  third decade of operation. Six chiefs  of police and six mayors have come  and gone yet Languages of Life still  remains, with Monson firmly placed  at the helm. When asked, Monson’s  response is simple, “You work from  the heart, not from the head. Otherwise  close your doors.”  A wine tasting fundraiser for  Languages of Life will be held on  June 15, 6:30 p.m. at the Heart and  Crown on Preston Street. Tickets  are $30. In September, the agency  will hold its second silent auction  fundraiser in Fifth Avenue Court,  which will draw in people at a time  when the Bank Street construction  will be well underway. For enquiries  about tickets or donations,  please contact the office at 613-  232-9770.  *Caroline Brown who regularly*  *writes on the arts for the* Glebe Report  *has been working with Bryna at*  *Languages of Life since December*  *2010.* |