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| **Celebrating****Languages of Life**By Caroline Brown Few people know that the Glebeis harbouring one of the most industriouswomen in Ottawa. No, she isneither a diplomat nor Member ofParliament. She is the founder ofthe invaluable translation and interpretationagency Languages of LifeIncorporated, and her name is BrynaMonson. In 1979 Monson startedthe agency from her very own livingroom whilst immobilized with abroken leg. Starting fresh, she builtup a stockpile of translators and interpretersto assist people who couldnot speak either of Canada’s two officiallanguages whether it was inhospitals, with social services or inlegal matters. Monson explains why she startedthe agency. “I wanted to helppeople who needed help. When Iwas a social worker working withcancer patients in Ottawa CivicHospital, I would see patients anddoctors unable to communicate becauseof a language barrier. It wasvery difficult for me to see that.”Monson often says it was a blessingthat she broke her leg and wasable to initiate the translation service. Today the agency has movedout of her living room and into FifthAvenue Court. Languages of Life isa non-profit charitable organizationnow with over 400 translators andinterpreters for over 100 languages.Yet despite the notable expansionof the enterprise, the caring natureat the heart of this essential servicehas always remained true. Nomatter what the case, Languagesof Life provides a 24/7 service. Whether it is a midnight request foran interpreter in the cell block or anobscure and rare dialect needed in a*Bryna Monson stands near her Fifth**Avenue Court office.* | hospital, the call is always met witha prompt response. This can be afast paced job, but Monson takes itall in her stride. It is quality just as much as speedthat matters when sending out atranslator or interpreter. Languagesof Life deals with prominent organizationssuch as the Ottawa PoliceService, the RCMP, law firms, insurancecompanies and health services,all of whom require an unbiased,confidential service. A sure indicationof the quality of service Languagesof Life provides is evidentin a letter written by Debra Frazer,director general of the Ottawa PoliceService. “The Ottawa Police Serviceis proud of its longstanding, successfulpartnership with Languagesof Life,” she wrote to Monson. “Regardlessof the time of day – or night– Bryna’s agency quickly respondsto their needs. She has earned ourconfidence and trust with the highcalibre of her work and the integritythat underlies it.” With impressive accolades like thisit is no wonder Monson’s office wallsare lined with awards and letters ofsupport from the likes of the GovernorGeneral. In 1994 she received theATIO Award (Association of Translatorsand Interpreters of Ontario) forher contribution to the developmentof the language profession. She wasthe first non-translator candidate toreceive the award. She won the 1995Whitton Award for her contributionto community activism and MayorLarry O’Brien declared CanadianMulticulturalism Day 2007 a celebrationof the achievements of Languagesof Life. Unsurprisingly, Bryna Monson’sreputation now precedes her. Sheis a hard working, say-it-straight ordon’t-say-it-at-all kind of lady. Herdirect approach can often seem intimidatingbut those who know herwell know this is just surface deepand inside she has a heart of gold.This is made clear by the amount oftime and energy she has so lovinglyinvested in the agency. In addition toserving the entire Ottawa-Carletonregion, Monson conscientiouslysupports her local Glebe neighbourhood.Languages of Life has been inthe Glebe for 22 years and Monsonloves the location. She has a closerelationship with many of the localbusinesses and makes sure they allget a dose of her wicked sense ofhumour. What has made this small nonprofitcharitable organization sucha success? The agency is now in itsthird decade of operation. Six chiefsof police and six mayors have comeand gone yet Languages of Life stillremains, with Monson firmly placedat the helm. When asked, Monson’sresponse is simple, “You work fromthe heart, not from the head. Otherwiseclose your doors.” A wine tasting fundraiser forLanguages of Life will be held onJune 15, 6:30 p.m. at the Heart andCrown on Preston Street. Ticketsare $30. In September, the agencywill hold its second silent auctionfundraiser in Fifth Avenue Court,which will draw in people at a timewhen the Bank Street constructionwill be well underway. For enquiriesabout 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.* |