

2010 OLYMPICS



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Bouquet makers (from left) Megan Bradley, Marjorie Stuart and Amy Leung show the finished products of their labour at Just Beginning Flowers in Surrey.

Hope blooms for the disadvantaged

Women hired to make victory bouquets presented to athletes

BY DARAH HANSEN

VANCOUVER SUN

Life hasn't always been easy for Tandice Bartlett.

As a teenager, the 22-year-old Surrey resident found herself heading along a dark and troubled path. She had dropped out of school and struggled with addiction.

Then she met June Strandberg and good things started to bloom — quite literally.

Last spring, Bartlett completed a six-week floral-design course run through Strandberg's non-profit society, Just Beginning Flowers. The society offers training to mentally and physically challenged women as well as marginalized women, including those recovering from addiction, recently released from jail, escaping violent relationships or leaving the sex-trade. Bartlett is now one of 22 women — all graduates

of the same program — hired to create and shape the 1,800 victory bouquets to be presented to athletes during the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

"It's so exciting," Bartlett said as she got her first look at the official bouquet design Friday.

"I feel like I'm doing something for my country."

It was the inclusion of the Just Beginning Flowers Society that really put Strandberg, a Surrey florist with 60 years experience, and her colleague Margitta Schultz, ahead of the pack when the Vancouver Organizing Committee went looking for a creative team to design the bouquets.

While both women displayed ample talent at putting flowers together, Vanoc was also impressed with the message of hope and change the non-profit society offered.

"When we tendered a request for a proposal we obviously

wanted a design that showcases B.C. and Canada ... but also brings the social values to the Games," said Ann Duffy, Vanoc corporate-sustainability officer.

On Friday, the team of women tried its hand at preparing the bouquets in a kind of dress rehearsal for the real thing.

The trick is to make each bouquet look as much like the others as possible, in accordance with strict Olympic guidelines.

Each bouquet will measure 30 cm long and 20 cm in diameter and be made up of a collection of green hypericum berries, green spider mums, leatherleaf fern, loops of monkey grass and aspidistra leaves.

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