

Fernandez up for CBC volunteer champ

St. Albert resident one of thousands selected for competition

BY SCOTT HAYES
Staff Writer

To many hundreds, if not thousands of people in Central and South America, Victor Fernandez is a champion already. Now he's up for an honour that would prove it to the country.

The 54-year-old St. Albert resident is the head of Canadian Aid for Fire Services Abroad (CAFSA), a charity that recycles decommissioned firefighting equipment by donating and delivering it to communities in developing nations like his native Chile where resources are scarce. The man has personally delivered fire trucks, and his team of volunteers trains recipients on equipment use and firefighting methods to better protect themselves.

Now Fernandez has been nominated for a CBC contest called Canada's Champions of Change. Although he's up against a few thousand other nominees, he's just happy to be on the list because it provides a higher profile to his cause.

Recognition

"I'm glad that somebody is paying attention to the work that I'm doing. Every little article about us — about CAFSA — it means awareness to people. And that's cool! I'm getting very well known across the province."

He said he's trying his best to hold his composure about his excitement and he doesn't want to get his hopes up. He likened it to buying a lottery ticket: there's no guarantee of winning. In the past he has already received various commendations like the Meritorious Services Medal of Canada, the

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Alberta Emergency Services Medal and even the Alberta Centennial Medal.

"I'm proud and, at the same time, humble," he said before adding a challenge of his own to his fellow nominees. "At the same time, the race is on!" he laughed.

An independent panel of community and volunteer leaders will select the top 10 finalists. Those names will be announced on Nov. 15 and members of the public can then vote on who is the best volunteer performing service nationally and internationally.

Then in January 2011, during the 10th anniversary of the International Year of the Volunteer, an announcement will be made on CBC TV News to reveal the winners. There will be two grand prizes of \$25,000 each for their charity while eight other finalists will receive \$10,000 each.

To learn more about the contest or to view Fernandez's profile as a nominee, visit www.cbc.ca/change. To learn about his charity, long on to www.cafsa.net.

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