



There's a science to winning

May 31, 2006. 01:00 AM

LESLIE FERENC

STAFF REPORTER

While most girls her age were flipping through "zines" searching for the latest in fashion, music and movies, Larissa Vingilis-Jaremko was noticing a trend of a different kind.

Only 9 years old at the time, she observed that most of her female schoolmates shunned science and hated it.

"And most thought of scientists as old men — geeks with wild hair in white lab coats," she said with a chuckle.

But thanks to her, those gender stereotypes have come crashing down for thousands of young girls who have been members of the Canadian Association for Girls in Science. Founded by Vingilis-Jaremko in 1992, the club's aim is to promote science, technology, engineering and math for girls 7 to 16.

The girls-only club, with chapters across the country, makes science fun — even cool — by encouraging students to explore their interests in the field, said Vingilis-Jaremko, who is the club's national head. Activities include visits with scientists and hands-on experiments that bring the subject to life. Members have built and tested bridges in a wind tunnel, examined the physics of figure skating, and performed orthopaedic surgery on rubber knees.

Yesterday, the 23-year-old joined the ranks of another select group when she was presented with the Toronto YWCA 2006 Young Woman of Distinction Award for inspiring young girls to pursue their dreams and helping make the city a better place.

The University of Toronto Life Sciences major, who's poised to graduate in a few days with a four-year Bachelor of Science degree, admitted she never dreamed that CAGIS would blossom into a national organization touching the lives of so many. And she certainly never imagined that her efforts would earn her such high honours as the prestigious YWCA award.

"When I look at the amazing women being honoured this year and in the past, I'm so humbled," she said of the award presented at the Metro Toronto Convention Centre during the 26th annual fundraiser.

This year's Women of Distinction award winners were Rosemary Speirs, for civic engagement; Pamela Cross, for legal reform; Bridget Perrier, Turning Point; Florence Wong, Health and Well-Being; Isabel Bassett, leadership in public life and Kay Blair, community leadership.

In 2004, Vingilis-Jaremko's organization received a Michael Smith Award for Science Promotion, named after the University of British Columbia professor who won the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize for chemistry.

In recognition of her tireless commitment to the cause, Vingilis-Jaremko won a \$60,000 TD Canada Trust Scholarship for community leadership.
