

# Probus Club celebrates the past and looks to the future

by **Nathan Howes**  
special to the Beaver

For a quarter century, the Probus Club of Oakville (PCO) has been a place for retired businessmen to stay socially active in the community.

The club, established in 1988, is part of a worldwide organization for men and women who've retired from their profession or business and want to maintain a social network with others who have similar interests.

The Probus Club of Oakville recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with a luncheon at the Glen Abbey Golf Club.

"It's one of the oldest clubs in Canada. (It) is quite an accomplishment to be able to have recruited enough people to keep it going because not all clubs survive," said Probus Centre-Canada regional director Ted Nixon. "The trick is to keep getting enough new people in."

Probus clubs were launched by Rotary Club members in England in the mid-1960s.

The first club in Canada was in Cambridge, Ontario in 1987. Four others soon followed — White Rock and South Surrey, Burlington, Colingwood and then the Probus Club of Oakville in 1988. Currently, there

are 220 clubs with nearly 30,700 members across Canada.

The PCO gathers at least once a month for a meeting, activities and guest speakers. Members often take part in trips, social activities, tours and cultural and entertainment functions, among other events.

"These (activities) vary quite a bit. For example, we went to a *Guys and Dolls* show, we had a Valentine's Day lunch and we're taking a train trip to the Credit Valley in October," said PCO president Gerry Sutton.

In addition to the PCO, there are two other Probus clubs in Oakville — Old Oakville and North Oakville. There are 190 members in Old Oakville, more than 100 in PCO and about 175 in North Oakville. The latter is comprised of men and women.

Sutton is in favour of having men and women in the PCO, but it was decided the club would be men only.

"A lot of people want to keep it that way. We have functions though where the wives come. We have a Christmas lunch (and) a president's reception (where) wives are encouraged to come," said Sutton. "More and more women are getting into business and are going to be retiring. I think it's important that be recognized."

He noted the choice to remain ex-



John Beales is the incoming president of the Probus Club of Oakville, which recently celebrated its 25th anniversary.

| photo by Hannah Yoon – Oakville Beaver (Follow on Twitter @halton\_photog)

clusive to men is a decision made by members, since some clubs are "more comfortable with men only."

Probus Club of Oakville member Michael Purcell said the idea of women membership was discussed at two executive club meetings, but was turned down by committee members.

While the PCO will remain men-only, the chapter's social events are open to women.

"It's not like they're excluded from the opportunities, but they're not included as members in the clubs, per se," said Purcell.

While Oakville only has one combined club, it's a different scenario

across the country, Nixon said, adding most new groups have men and women members.

"It depends on what people want. Because women live longer than men, generally, we seem to have more women in our clubs than men," said Nixon. "I think it's going to be the way of the future."

Going forward, Sutton wants to see the Probus Club of Oakville increase membership and diversify its guest speakers and activities.

"All of our members are retired, so the challenge is to replace those members with new retirees. (It) isn't a problem everywhere, but it's one of the challenges we face," said Sutton. "We're still doing the things we did 25 years ago, which has stood the test of time."

The future of Probus clubs in Canada is "heading in the right direction," Nixon said. Its goal is to have a club in every community across Canada.

"New Zealand, England and Australia have more clubs than we do, but we're a big country with a small population. Probus is good for our communities. People have a good time in Probus," said Nixon.

"Despite some losses, Probus in Canada is doing very, very well," he said.



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