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Oakville Beaver Focus

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The Wizard of HOPE

Walk

Walk with Wizard for schizophrenia research

By Christina Chabot
SPECIAL TO THE BEAVER

A young family walks down Lakeshore Road on a sunny Saturday afternoon, browsing the shops and breathing the spring air. As they round the corner, a middle-aged, mentally disabled man walks towards them.

From inside the stroller, the young toddler peers at him with interest, while the rest of the family glances and looks away. The man's arms begin to flail in anger, his mouth foaming as he veers towards the family with aggressive strides.

Most people have never encountered or even heard of a scenario like this. But what do we think when we see a mentally disabled person pass us by?

"There is a stigma surrounding mentally disabled people," says Bonnie Grant, co-ordinator of the Family & Friends Support Group of the Schizophrenia Society of Ontario (SSO), Oakville chapter.

"There shouldn't be. It's a very small percentage of them that are violent."

(See Walk to raise awareness' page B2)

Howard Wills, 71, a Salvation Army Red Shield Appeal volunteer canvasser for 19 years, places a donation brochure in a mailbox along one of his 12 routes. He is an area captain and has 35 volunteer canvassers helping him collect donations this month.

Dedicated Red Shield canvasser

By Wilma Blokhuis
BEAVER FOCUS EDITOR

Dedicated volunteers like Howard Wills are the backbone of the Salvation Army's Red Shield Appeal.

Today, midway through the campaign, his kitchen table is completely covered with campaign materials – pamphlets, binders and route lists. Red and white campaign bags for zone leaders are taking over his chesterfield. His home is beginning to resemble a Salvation Army office.

"This is my 19th year," says the soft-spoken 71-year-old.

He started knocking on the doors for the Salvation Army in 1983.

"We had just moved here. I started by canvassing one street. The following year I was a zone leader. Seven years ago, I became an area captain."

He oversees some 91 routes in nine zones. Each zone has 10 or 11 routes or streets, each with about 10 houses.

Wills begins to collate the routes when the new phone book comes out, checking the names and phone numbers against the previous year's lists.

"Whenever a house goes up for sale, or is sold, I make a note of it, because the name I have will no longer be applicable."

And, he muses, "the phone book listing is done in mid-November, so when it comes out in February, it's six months out of date."

His area covers all of the streets between Fourth Line and River Side Drive, and from Lake Ontario to Speers Road. He makes sure that at least 50% of this area is canvassed.

Wills not only keeps meticulous lists of the people on each route, he also writes down how much they give.

"So far, we've got about \$6,000."

Of the nine zones in his area, he handles seven zones. Wills, an avid hiker and walker, also does his share of the door-to-door canvassing, covering 12 routes.

Finding zone leaders and canvassers is a daunting task, says Wills.

"I made about 200 phone calls this year, and got 35 canvassers."

"A lot of older people don't want to do it any more," he lamented. "Someone may have had a fall, they're not as agile, or there may be an illness."

He added increasing job pressures also makes it more difficult to recruit volunteers.

"And, younger people are often too busy at their jobs. I lost one zone leader because he would be away so much for work."

"A lot of younger people are so busy at work that once they get home they're wiped out, or they have families – kids to get to base-ball and classes – or something."

Hence, many of the 100 canvassers in

Oakville are older people.

"Many of our canvassers are aging, are dealing with illnesses, and are passing away," says Jo-Ann Tetreault, the Salvation Army's new annual giving representative for Oakville, Milton and Campbellville. "We desperately need new canvassers."

"To really cover Oakville, we'll have to do 10 times that (number) next year," continues Tetreault, adding several areas of town will not be canvassed due to a lack of volunteers.

Wills got involved with the Oakville Salvation Army through a co-worker of his late wife.

"She got me started," he remembers fondly of his wife who died of cancer in 1984.

"My late wife worked with a Dutch lady who had moved from Scarborough to Oakville, and they always kept in touch. So, when we moved here from east Toronto, we went with her to a Watch Night service on New Year's Eve. We didn't know what else to do, because we didn't know anybody in Oakville, except her."

"The Salvation Army had made us feel so welcome. So, the following year at campaign time, I volunteered."

If interested in volunteering for the Salvation Army's Red Shield Appeal, call Jo-Ann Tetreault at 905-825-9208 Ext. 135.

"We had just moved here. I started by canvassing one street. The following year I was a zone leader. Seven years ago, I became an area captain."

— Howard Wills

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