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Marion Argue has spent the better part of her 76 years in the health field, cultivating a better life for those who are mentally or physically ill.

Now, she is the recipient of help as she battles cancer of the esophagus.

The outpouring of support has buoyed Argue's spirits as she prepares for chemotherapy and radiation treatments at Kingston hospital.

"I would certainly like you to include in this article how good my neighbours and friends and relatives (have been)," she said. "My mind boggles — food trays of stuff at my doors every two days. All these people bring me books ... I am just overwhelmed with people who are doing nice things for me."

Neighbours also "sneak" over early in the morning or later at night to tend her garden of flowers that encircle Edgehill, as her stately Belleville residence is known.

It is a measure of their respect for the former London, Ont. resident who came here in training at the hospital as a Registered Nurse in 1953 and never left.

In 1965 she married lawyer William Argue, whose parents owned Edgehill, which was built in about 1890.

Edgehill became Marion and William's home in 1974.

"There have only been three owners," she said. Bill died in 1998.

With its veranda and lead glass, the home has been featured on the Festival of Trees tour, and in 2001 for Habitat for Humanity. It has five bedrooms and three storeys and you might think it is a chore for Marion to look after. Not so.

"I enjoy it," she said, smiling. "I find it a very comfortable house."

She will allow that it is "bigger than I need," but when her daughter's family, which includes three grandchildren, visit, the house is "just right."

Marion is nothing if not inventive. When she had a hip replacement last year, she set up a basket on a rope — "my dumb waiter" — because it was impossible to use the stairs.

She used to love to throw cocktail parties, as opposed to dinner parties.

"You get more people that way," Marion said, laughing. "I love to throw a party when I am well."

In 1966, Marion left nursing, but she had racked up an impressive record, serving in the emergency room, assistant head of medical surgery, head of medical surgery, teacher of nursing and head nurse in the intensive care unit and medical surgery unit.

Argue, Marion

Her volunteer activities have included, not surprisingly, an eight-year stint on the Belleville General Hospital board of governors, and from 1998-2003 on the amalgamated Quinte Health Care board.

She has also served on the board of the Access Centre for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties and is currently vice-chairwoman of the Mental Health Support Network board.

It is the latter that now stands out in her mind and she was involved when changes were made to revamp mental health services here.

"(It's important to) get rid of the stigma and to get these people back into the regular stream of society," she said.

Ironically, she has been a volunteer for 30 years with the Canadian Cancer Society.

Marion is also a long-time member of the Women's Christian Association.

In a little more than a decade after forming in 1879, the group — which at the time boasted a membership of several hundred — had purchased land, built the Belleville hospital and established a local School of Nursing.

In 1948, the WCA presented the hospital to the city of Belleville. The organization still exists and makes donations. Marion is one of a handful of members.

She has also been involved with the Canadian Red Cross Society, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and the Belleville hospital nurses' alumni association.

Years ago she began a modelling career with That Special Touch women's wear store downtown.

"I'm modelling in the fashion show," she said, shaking her head. "I started it at age 70."

When not on the runway or busy with her host of volunteer activities, Marion likes to relax by reading or watching a favourite TV show.

"I watch Jeopardy. I like that one. I watch news. I read The Intelligencer," she said.

Then there is her sanctuary, a cottage on Limerick Lake that can only be accessed by boat.

"Oh, I love the cottage," then added, "I've only spent one week there this summer."

Whatever the future holds, Marion is not about to complain about a life that has been full and rich.

"I was busy every day of my life."